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VERA'S TRUST

Evelyn Everett Green

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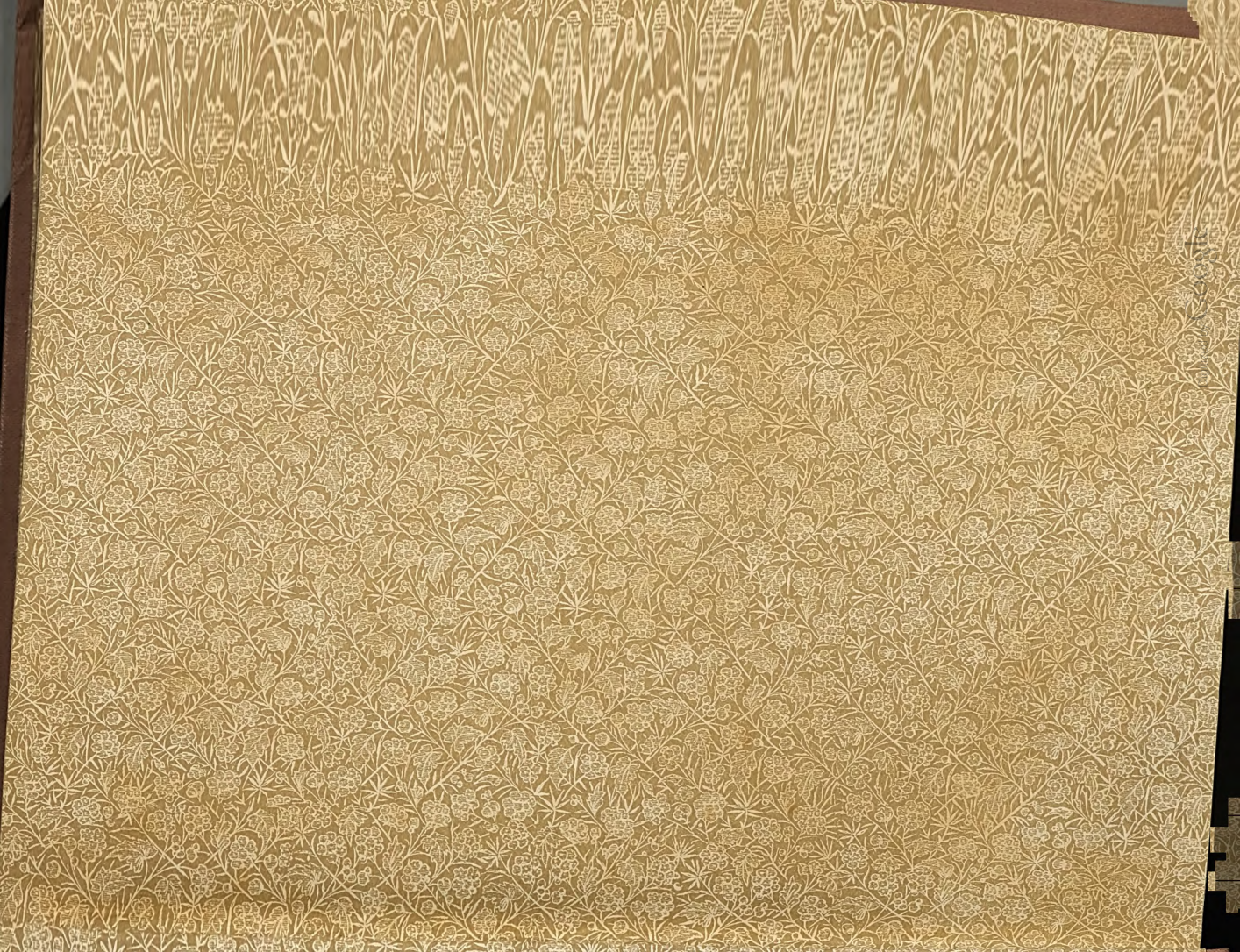

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" Oh, he's bitten you," she cried, horror-struck. " Bill, let go this moment! Let go, you naughty, wicked dog!"

Page 81.

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VERA'S TRUST

A TALE

By

EVELYN EVERETT-GREEN

"On and on flew the little white-sailed boat."

Page 185.

T. NELSON AND SONS

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VERA'S TRUST

A TALE

BY

Evelyn Everett-Green

AUTHOR OF "FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT," "TEMPLE'S TRIAL,"
"THE HEIRESS OF WYLMINGTON,"
&c. &c.

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

MATT. xxvi. 41.

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, and New York

1889

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VERA'S TRUST.

CHAPTER I.

OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE.

"WHEW! what a hubbub, to be sure!" said Fred Carmichael softly to himself, as he hung up his hat and coat in the hall, and passed his hand rather wearily across his brow. He had come in tired from a hard day's work at the hospital, and the babel of sound that greeted his ears on his entrance was anything but welcome to his jaded nerves. He was a tall, well-set-up young fellow, good-looking and pleasant-tempered, a favourite both at home and with his fellow-students at the hospital; but to-night there was an unusual irritation both of voice and manner as he threw open the dining-room door, from whence all the tumult proceeded. His name was shouted by a chorus of voices, but he made no direct answer, only asking, with a ring of impatience in his voice,—

"What on earth are you making all this noise

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about? It's a most intolerable nuisance to other people.—Raby, why can't you keep something like decent order at table?"

Raby, the eldest of this noisy party of brothers and sisters, looked up from her book and shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, it's perfectly hopeless trying to get a word in edgeways; besides, nobody ever listens to me."

"You should make them listen."

Raby laughed good-temperedly. She did not look like one who would ever have much influence anywhere. Pretty, placid, gentle and lovable she might be, but a power in the house, never.

"Well," said Fred, speaking out aloud in a momentary pause in the hubbub of voices, "I for one shall be very glad when Vera arrives. It is high time she took you all in hand."

Madge jumped up from her place at table, and ran gaily to her big brother.

"Now, you dear, cross, tiresome old Fred, don't you say nasty, horrid things like that. You know you don't think anything of the kind. You know you don't want Vera a bit more than the rest of us do."

"Oh, don't I?" he answered shortly; "that shows how much you know!"

"We're all going to enter into an alliance, offensive and defensive, against Vera," sang out Fritz, who was tilting himself back in his chair at a perilous angle.

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"Fred, will you be sworn into the noble ranks? Britons never shall be slaves!"

"Never, never, never shall be slaves!" roared out a whole chorus of voices; and Fred put his hands up to his ears.

"Come along, Fritz!" cried Donald rising. "We've got our lessons to prepare, and there's no fun to be got out of old Fred to-night, that's plain. Let's be off.—Yes, Willie boy, you come along too. You shall look out words for us in the dictionary, to keep you amused." And the three boys trooped off together, whilst peace and quietness descended upon the room when once the door had closed behind them.

Madge looked half disposed to follow, but turned first to Fred and asked,—

"What makes you so cross to-night?"

"I'm not cross," he answered, sitting down to the table and reaching out for a clean plate. "At least I don't mean to be; only you do make such an awful row amongst you, and when a fellow comes in tired it makes him feel a bit irritable.—Give me a cup of tea, Raby; I'm as thirsty as a fish.—Well, Tiny, what have you got to say for yourself? How has the world been using you?"

The last observation was addressed to a little blue-eyed, golden-haired sister of eight—the youngest of that large family party—who had crept up with the confidence of a pet and a favourite to her big brother's side. She knew quite well that he would never be

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cross to her; she never remembered hearing a rough word from his lips.

"I'm going to butter your bread for you," she said sedately, "'cause you're tired and ought to be taken care of.—Raby, give him his tea. He is thirsty, poor, dear boy.—Now tell me about the children. Are they going on nicely? Have any of them had relapses?"

Fred's eyes lighted with his pleasant smile. He was in the habit of amusing his little sister with stories about the children in the hospital where he was a student. Tiny knew all about his juvenile patients, and asked daily after their welfare with unfailing interest.

"I don't think so. I believe they're all right; but I wasn't much in the wards to-day; I had other work to do.—Well, Madge, what is it? You seem bursting with some information. What have you got to say?"

"Nothing very much—only—Fred, are you *really* glad that Vera is coming; or do you only say it to tease us?"

He looked at her half surprised.

"I am very glad indeed," he answered readily, "and I cannot imagine why you are not too."

Madge fidgeted from one foot to the other; her bright, handsome, boyish face betrayed a good many conflicting and rebellious feelings.

"Vera does not seem to belong to us."

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"That's a matter of opinion, my dear. She seems very much indeed to belong to me."

"Ah, that's different. You are so much older than the rest of us. You remember her when she lived here—lived at home, I mean—before she went to nurse and be with Aunt Mary."

"To be sure I do. She was fourteen before she left home, and I was twelve. We were always together. I missed her when she went away as much as the boys would miss you, Madge. When she was taken off to Tasmania I was awfully cut up about it. It seemed so horrid losing her like that. However, we are going to have her back at last, thank goodness, and I, for one, am awfully glad."

"Awfully glad Aunt Mary is dead?" questioned Madge mischievously.

"I did not say that, Miss Impudence, though, as I've never seen my worthy aunt since she went away nine years ago, I don't profess to mourn her very deeply; but I am uncommonly glad to have Vera back. A house without a mistress is a miserable kind of place."

Madge did not answer for a moment. She had felt their mother's death keenly when it had occurred rather more than a year ago, suddenly and unexpectedly; for she was a warm-hearted, affectionate girl. But time had softened the blow and to a great extent filled the blank, and she had grown used to the rather chaotic state into which the household had

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fallen, and on the whole enjoyed it. She was conscious that a certain pleasant sense of power and liberty would be materially lessened by the arrival of any one who would take up the reins of government with anything like firmness or authority.

"I think Raby manages things very well," said she after a pause.

"I've no doubt Raby does her best," was the answer, "but Raby is only eighteen."

"Well, I'm sure that is old enough for anything!" cried the thirteen-year-old Madge. "Lots of girls are married no older than Raby. Vera must be twenty-five—quite an old maid!"

Fred broke into a sudden laugh.

"I don't think there will be much of the 'old maid,' as you call it, about Vera, my dear."

"You can't tell. You haven't seen her for nine years. You say she went away when she was fourteen."

"She writes to me regularly."

"Oh, letters are no good, every one knows!" cried Madge. "The stupidest people often write the best letters, and *vice versa*. *That's* no argument."

"I have photographs too."

Madge mused a little; there was more sense, she thought, in that suggestion.

"Vera's photographs are lovely—I admit that," she said; "but one never knows if they've not been touched up or doctored into something quite different

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from the original; or perhaps they are not Vera at all, but somebody she is passing off as herself to make us think she is beautiful."

Fred laughed the suggestion to scorn.

"Not quite, my clever sister. I know Vera just a little too well for that. People don't cast their shells like dragon-flies and come out quite different beings in the course of a few years. I think Vera has changed very little. She looks to me just as she always did—her own self, not a bit like any one else in the world."

"Well," said Madge laughing, "it is plain that you are going over to the enemy straight off. We shall get no help from you."

"Help in what?"

Madge's eyes were dancing with mischief. She was a merry, light-hearted, quick-tempered girl, at once wilful, headstrong, and affectionate. But her wilfulness had grown upon her a good deal of late in the absence of proper authority at home, and she was by no means anxious to see a term put to the period of pleasant liberty that had opened for them. Raby's hands held the reins very loosely; and poor Miss Sefton, the daily governess, was a cipher in the house even during the hours she nominally ruled the school-room party. High-spirited Madge was getting to have things pretty much all her own way there, and she by no means welcomed the advent of the almost unknown eldest sister, who was now on her way back

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from the antipodes to take up her position as mistress in her father's house. There was no malice in Madge's nature, nor in that of either of her boisterous school-boy brothers; but they had all banded together to set at defiance the expected tyranny of the future queen, and to assert themselves in a way that would at least be troublesome if it were nothing worse.

Raby took matters more placidly, as it was her nature to do; but she was not averse to the proposed scheme of defiance and rebellion. She rather enjoyed the dignity of her position as nominal mistress of the house; and although nobody really looked up to her or expected any show of authority from her, yet at least she was freed from restraint herself, and could go on her quiet, indolent way, without being spurred up or rebuked by any one.

Fred, the eldest son, was the only member of that household acutely conscious of the disorganized state into which matters were drifting. He had inherited his mother's refined taste and love for law and order, and he detested untidiness, tumult, and lawlessness under whatever guise it presented itself. His father, a wealthy merchant, a busy man, full of business both of mercantile and philanthropic character, was very little at home, and consequently hardly knew how things were going in his house. He was a kindly, benevolent man, and an affectionate father; but his time was too much filled up to admit of his seeing much of his children, and since his wife's death he had

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got into the way of spending most of his evenings from home, visiting working-men's clubs, attending public meetings, doing much good, and enjoying the doing of it as men of his calibre are wont to do. All this philanthropy, however, took him much away from his own home, and he was not half so well aware of the reforms needed there as his eldest son.

Fred looked hard at Madge as she put her mischievous question.

"Help in what?" he asked again.

Madge looked preternaturally grave all in a moment.

"To uphold the rights of the republic—to make a stand for national liberties. Have you no patriotism, Fred? Do you want these golden days of freedom to set for ever? You must band with us to cry, '*Vive la liberté—à bas l'impératrice!*'"

"Ah!" remarked Fred, as if suddenly enlightened, "that's the way the wind blows, is it, Madge? Well, it strikes me that if you try that game on with Vera, you may chance to get the worse of it."

Madge's black eyes opened very wide.

"In unity is strength," she observed sententiously.

"Exactly; and in egregious folly there is weakness," he answered with a short laugh. "Well, I must get to my books now.—No, Tiny, no more bread and butter. I mustn't spoil my dinner. What! you want to come with me, do you? But I haven't time for any stories to-night."

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"I don't mind for that," answered the little child; "I'd like to come and sit with you whilst you work."

And when Fred in his little sanctum, called his "den," settled to his books and papers, Tiny sat down upon the rug before the fire with her arms round the neck of her brother's great bull-dog Bill, a sweet-tempered, savage-looking brute, affectionately disposed to all the family, but devoted in his attachment to his master and to Tiny.

"Bill," said the little girl, in the low, confidential tones in which she was accustomed to address her favourite—"Bill, do you think you will love Vera when she comes? Will you like a new mistress, dear Bill?"

Bill flopped his short strong tail vigorously upon the carpet, and snuggled his wide brindled muzzle closer against the child's cheek.

"Don't slobber, Bill dear," went on Tiny gravely; "I know it means you love me, but I'd rather you loved me *dry*, if you don't mind. I'm very pleased that Vera's coming. I don't tell Madge so, because she would not understand; but I'm very glad, and I think you'll be glad too, Bill; only—only—oh, dear! I *do* hope she won't say you must not come indoors;" and the child's face suddenly put on a look of consternation and apprehension. Bill, instinctively scenting trouble, tried to get still closer to his little mistress, the result being that he nearly pushed her over, which made Tiny laugh. Fred looked up and gave

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the dog a friendly kick, bidding him mind his manners.

"Oh, don't be cross to him, Fred, he's such a dear Bill," cried Tiny.—"No, don't lick me, please; you didn't hurt me a bit.—Fred, *do* you think when Vera comes that she will say Bill must live in the stables?"

Tiny put the question with so much anxiety that Fred laughed.

"No, I don't think so. Why should she?"

"I don't know. Miss Sefton always says he ought to live there. She calls him ugly—*ugly*, Fred—my own dear, darling, beautiful Bill;" and the child threw her arms about the great neck of the bull-dog. "If she had her way, he would be sent away to live in the mews, and I should never see him."

"Well, she hasn't got her own way, so you needn't take on so," answered Fred.

"No, only—only there is Vera."

"Well?"

"And she will be mistress when she comes, won't she, Fred?"

"Thank goodness, yes!"

"And they say," continued the child seriously, "that she will be twice as bad as Miss Sefton; that she will upset everything, and make us all miserable. Do you think she will, Fred?"

Fred's brows had drawn themselves a little together.

"I am quite sure she will not. Who talks all that nonsense?"

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"Oh, Madge and the boys, and Raby sometimes. They all say they will not obey her or mind any rules she may make. Is it naughty of them, Fred?" asked the child, getting up and standing at his side.

He pushed aside his books and took her on his knee.

"It is very silly of them at any rate; but they will find that out for themselves in time. Which party are you going to belong to, Tiny?"

"Which party?"

"Yes: are you going to join the others in being unkind to Vera when she comes, or to help me in trying to make her happy, and in loving her very much?"

Tiny looked up with great seriousness.

"I am very pleased Vera is coming," she said; "I shall love her, I know, if you do, Fred. Only *do* you think she will let dear Bill stay indoors?"

Fred laughed and patted the head of the dog; for Bill, hearing his own name, had risen up with his paws upon his master's knee, and was wagging his tail fast and furiously, and "smiling," as Tiny called it, with his lips drawn back and a villanous grin upon his benevolent, ugly face.

"I think I can answer for that, Tiny. Vera will not banish our playfellow. Bill will find a new mistress quite to his taste, I am sure."

Tiny looked relieved.

"Then, I'm sure I shall love her, and so will you, and so will Bill—that will be three of us. We will

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make her happy if we can, whatever the others do, won't we? I think it will be rather nice when somebody comes to make rules again. It isn't so nice as it sounds, always doing just what we like."

Fred laughed, kissed the child, and put her off his knee, for it was her bed-time and nurse's warning knock sounded at the door.

As the child vanished he turned again to his papers, saying half aloud,—

"Poor Vera! I'm afraid she is going to have rather a rough time of it at first. I wish I had not to be out all the day."

Meantime the two sisters, Raby and Madge, had left the dining-room and had gone upstairs together. For a London house, Mr. Carmichael's was particularly pleasant and commodious—a West End mansion of considerable size, with a very fair garden in the rear and ample accommodation even for his large family. Schoolroom and nurseries lay in a sort of wing away from the main block of the house, and no noise from those regions ever reached the handsome reception-rooms where Mr. Carmichael received his guests or sat in the evenings with his eldest son and daughter. He had little knowledge of the turbulent spirits shut in behind the heavy red-baize doors. He had no notion that his eldest daughter was coming back to anything but the easiest and pleasantest of homes. He took it for granted that the presence of a capable and competent mistress of the house would be as

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agreeable to all parties as it was in anticipation to himself. It never occurred to him to doubt that the eldest sister would be received with open arms by all. In his eyes a sister was a sister, and there was an end of it. The fact that she had been nine years absent from England, and was a total stranger to her brothers and sisters, was a matter of comparatively trifling significance. He could not see that it greatly affected the question one way or another. He took it for granted, as many benevolently-minded people of catholic sympathies are in the habit of doing, that every new relation must of necessity be a very agreeable addition to a household. He always liked to feel the presence of numbers in his house, although he had very little time to give to his children himself; and upon that same principle he felt quite certain that Vera's arrival would be hailed with unmixed joy by the whole community.

His opinion, however, as has been seen, was not shared by the majority.

As Raby and Madge stood together in the little boudoir leading from the big double drawing-room, the former looked round rather discontentedly and said,—

"I suppose this will have to be given up to Vera now."

"Why?" asked Madge quickly.

"Oh, because you know I couldn't keep it if she had no room of her own. This was mamma's special place before she died, and it seems as if it ought to

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belong to the lady of the house; only it's such a bore having to give up things. I liked this cosy little room, where I could do as I pleased, and where nobody ever disturbed me; but of course everything will be different now. I do call it very hard."

Madge's face had clouded over.

"And I suppose I shall be sent back to the school-room again," she said discontentedly, "and kept there all day, as I used to be. I hate being shut up with Miss Sefton and the children. I can stand it in lesson times, but I detest it the rest of the day. I call it horrid altogether. Why couldn't Vera have got married and have stayed out there for good? She would have done if she'd been a bit nice, I should think. I didn't know till to-day how much Fred thought of her. It's rather a bore if he takes her side. It won't be so easy to crush her."

"I never did think it would be as easy as you made out," answered Raby. "It's all very well to talk, but one can't be always wrangling with people. Even you would soon get tired of it; and as for the boys, I know they will give in directly. Fritz is much too careless and harum-scarum to stick to anything he says; and we all know what Donald is like."

Madge laughed a little, for Donald's sweet temper and gentlemanly manners had been his marked characteristics from childhood upwards. He might promise to revolt against Vera's encroachments, but his brothers and sisters knew well enough that he

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would be of very little use as an ally. He never could be relied on to speak sharply or angrily, or to do or say anything that might hurt his antagonist's feelings.

"It seems to me," said Madge, with a short laugh, "that practically I shall have the battle all to myself."

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CHAPTER II.

TWO BROTHERS.

NOT very far away from the large comfortable house inhabited by Mr. Carmichael and his family stood a narrow dull street of respectable but very dreary lodging-houses—houses with thin walls and creaking floors, with ill-fitting doors and windows, smoky chimneys and rickety staircases—houses that concealed their poverty-stricken aspect under an assumption of comfort, of the kind well described by the adjective "shabby-genteel," inhabited for the most part by needy, anxious-faced landladies, and by lodgers who only knew too well something of the hardness and cruelty of the battle of life.

Number 10 Jervis Place was a pretty fair type of the whole street. The ground-floor rooms were rented at present by a daily governess who had lately settled there, a thin, pale, spectacled maiden lady, who always appeared in a depressed and anxious state of mind. The drawing-room floor had been taken by a medical student, quite a wealthy

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man as people went in Jervis Place, and respected accordingly by Mrs. Norris, his landlady. Indeed, she was wont to draw somewhat unflattering comparisons between his "ways of going on" and those of her remaining lodgers—two young men, brothers, who occupied her second floor, with its one sitting-room, bed-room, and dressing-room. Not that the Grahams owed her a penny, or had run into debt in any quarter, so far as she knew, during the three years they had rented her rooms; but they lived with exceeding frugality, never saw any company or went anywhere, and were altogether of a different stamp from Mr. Wells, who lived like a gentleman, and was free with his money as a gentleman should be.

Mrs. Norris liked to know something about her lodgers, their circumstances, their antecedents, and their family history; and the true cause of her feeling of antipathy towards the Grahams resulted from the fact that they never for a moment lifted the impenetrable reserve that seemed to wrap them round in an atmosphere of entire isolation.

In the front room, the parlour, at a table covered with books and papers, the two brothers were seated this bleak March evening. Both were very busy and very intent over their work; the dark head and the sunny one were bent diligently over the heavy books upon the table; leaves were turned, pens scratched over the paper, but the silence was for long unbroken. At last, however, the younger of the pair, a lad of

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fifteen, laid down his pen, shut up his books, and indulged in a good stretch.

"There!" he said; "I've done for to-night. Now, Russell, put away those stupid exercises, and let us have some tea. I'm sure you must want it as much as I do."

"Well, put the kettle on to boil; I shall have finished this batch by the time you have got things ready," was the somewhat abstracted reply. But the dark head was not lifted for a moment, as the young schoolmaster still continued his task of revision and correction.

Lancelot put away his books, whistling softly to himself the while. He was a very attractive-looking boy, with a fair, open face, brilliantly coloured, despite his London rearing and the poverty of his surroundings, with that rich fluctuating colour that changes from red to pale and from pale to red with every varying emotion, indicating a quick, sensitive temperament, and perhaps a not over robust constitution. He had thick wavy hair of golden brown, large blue eyes, and delicately-pencilled brows. His expression was winning and engaging, a smile seemed always hovering about his lips and shining in his eyes. If life had been at all hard for him, it did not seem as if its hardness had oppressed his spirits in any way.

Far different, however, was the expression upon the thin, chiselled face of the elder brother, Russell. No casual observer would have believed those two to

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be brothers; they might almost have been father and son for the apparent dissimilarity in age. Lancelot barely looked his fifteen years, whilst Russell's face was stamped by lines of care and thought and pain that sometimes made it difficult to believe he was but twenty-seven. His was an unusual countenance, dark and stern and sad; yet it could soften at times to a look of haunting sweetness and tenderness, and the large dark eyes beneath the square projecting brow often rested upon the bright face of the younger lad with a gaze of peculiarly loving solicitude. For the rest, he was a decidedly handsome man, with clearly-cut features of a very refined type, and a mouth indicative of great reserve of power. It was a face that, once seen, was not easily forgotten—a face of which people were wont to say, "It must belong to a man with a history."

Lancelot had heard that remark made more than once at the large collegiate school where he was a pupil and his brother a master.

"Have we a history, Russell?" he had laughingly asked; and the elder brother had answered very quietly and unconcernedly,—

"A very ordinary history, Lancelot, I think. Just a long struggle with poverty and want—the history of many men better than ourselves. But we have always managed to keep the wolf from the door so far; therefore we are more fortunate than many others."

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"You have, you mean," Lancelot had answered quickly. "I am nothing but a burden to you, and don't see how to mend matters yet for awhile."

With one of his rare touches of tenderness, Russell had laid his arm caressingly across his brother's shoulder,—

"A burden, Lancelot? Never let that word pass your lips again, dear boy. Don't you know that it is you and your love that make life just bearable?"

Lancelot found life more than bearable, a pleasant thing enough; for he had grown up so used to poverty that it never greatly troubled him; and he possessed one of those happy elastic temperaments that could never be seriously depressed by passing troubles or the darkness of a cloudy sky. It troubled him no whit that his coats wore out faster than they could be replaced, that the wristbands were frayed and the seams all shiny with wear long before the old garment could be replaced by a new. He only laughed when his hat was condemned by the voice of public opinion, and told his critics that an old friend was always better than a new. Poverty never weighed on his mind, unless, indeed, he saw by his brother's face that it was troubling him; then he would look grave for a time, and long ardently for the day to come when he could do something to share the burden that Russell now bore alone. But nothing clouded his sunny spirits for long together, and he knew that nothing

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troubled his brother more than to see his face grave or sad.

It was bright enough to-night, as the boy went about his little domestic tasks with the ease and dexterity of long practice. For three years he and his brother had inhabited these same rooms, in the neighbourhood of the school they both attended in different capacities, and Lancelot had always taken upon himself as much of the servant's work as he could accomplish.

Russell had a great dislike to the careless, slip-shod fashion in which the one servant of the establishment performed her various offices. Her very presence in the rooms annoyed his fastidious eye. He could not sit down to a table set by her clumsy hands. Lancelot often wondered why it was that his brother was so particular in all trifles of this sort. His mother had been just the same, the mother they had lost five years before in Germany, where they had always lived ever since he could remember, up to that time when, orphaned of their only remaining parent, they had come to England, and by means of Russell's talents and indefatigable industry had managed to keep their heads above water. Lancelot always had a vague impression that there had been something in the past of his beautiful mother and grave-faced brother that he had never known or shared. Russell's ideas about things were different from those of most young men brought up in the way he had

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been. Poverty had never blunted the fine edge of his perceptions, had never made him the least bit slovenly in his dress or person, nor rubbed off from his manner and bearing that peculiarly dignified courtliness that assimilated itself oddly with his sordid surroundings. "The prince in disguise" had often been a sobriquet of his, and Lancelot had felt that there was some justice in the application of the term. He often looked at his brother with curiosity and admiration, often longed to cross-question him more closely than he had ever yet done upon his far-away boyhood, of which he never spoke. Lancelot was in a transition stage, developing in mind and body with rapid strides. Many things he had accepted once without a thought gave him food for speculation and meditation now. He began to wonder sometimes about the father who had died in his own infancy; to ask himself how it was that he and his brother were so singularly alone in the world, without a relative or kinsman of any kind. Russell always turned the conversation when it approached channels like these, and turned it so adroitly that Lancelot was seldom conscious of feeling baffled at the time; but baffled he certainly was, as he was forced afterwards to admit, seeing that he knew no more of their past history or antecedents than he had done before.

Some lads of his age would never have been contented to remain so long in ignorance, especially with an indefinable impression that the past held some

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buried secret purposely withheld; but Lancelot's sunny, sanguine temper enabled him to accept life as he found it, in a happy unquestioning fashion, and he rarely troubled himself to wonder over his brother's settled gravity, or the instincts and tastes so much above his present means and position.

However, he laid the small table at which they took their frugal meals with scrupulous care, made the tea, toasted some slices of stale bread, and made the most of what their modest larder contained. At least the teaspoons were silver, even though old and battered; and the china was real crown Derby, the relics of those "better days" of whose existence Lancelot knew nothing save what these indications told him. Russell could enjoy his simple repast when the appointments at the table were to his mind; but anything like a "hugger-mugger" meal, however plentiful and sumptuous, went terribly against the grain with him. Lancelot used to watch him with amusement sometimes, on the rare occasions when the brothers went out to tea with some of his fellow-masters, to see how difficult it was for him to eat off a carelessly washed plate, or to touch the ill-cooked, ill-dressed viands that appeared at their tables. He had learned how to fast like a monkish ascetic, but he had never been able to bring himself to relish greasy cooking, or to grow indifferent to scrupulous cleanliness and nicety of detail. Lancelot knew this all too well, and often wondered what made his brother

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so different from the ordinary run of men of his class.

At least he could make his home comfortable for him, if he could do nothing else. The boy often said he should make a capital maid-of-all-work, if all other careers were closed to him; and now, having put the finishing touches to his deft handiwork, he summoned his brother with increased urgency.

"Now, Russell, do come; there's a good fellow! I'm awfully hungry, if you're not. It's eight o'clock too—high time we had some relaxation. Now, be sociable for once, and don't be in a fever to be at your work again."

Russell pushed back his hair and rose as his brother's words penetrated his understanding. Then he smiled a little, and came and took the easy-chair Lancelot had drawn up for him near to the fire.

"I'm bad company for you, old chap."

"Not a bit of it, only I wish you wouldn't always work so hard."

A flickering smile played over the elder brother's face.

"Don't you wish that, Lancelot. Let us be very thankful that I have plenty of work to do—even if it is hard."

But Lancelot was not to be put down so easily.

"That's all very fine; but old Robertson works you much harder than any other master—lots of fellows say so—and he doesn't pay you any more for

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it either. I don't think it's fair. I would strike if I were you."

"That you would not, my boy, I can tell you," was Russell's answer.

"Well, it isn't fair," persisted Lancelot. "I think he takes advantage of—of—well, of our poverty I suppose it is."

Russell's face flushed a little, but he only said very quietly,—

"You know nothing at all about it, Lance. It is all perfectly right and fair." And Lancelot knew that he had better not try to pursue the topic further. It had never occurred to him that possibly the easy terms on which his own education was conducted was the cause of the extra labour imposed upon his brother. He was too young and light-hearted to trouble himself much over considerations of this kind; yet he had a pretty good notion that Russell was harder worked than any of the other masters, and he was sometimes half uneasy lest the strain of his unremitting labour should tell upon a constitution not over robust. Russell never had been ill, that he could remember, but he often had a fagged, tired look in his eyes, that Lancelot hated to see; and yet he would never spare himself a bit, but actually added to his daily tasks connected with the school by undertaking some work in another quarter that involved the loss of his one leisure afternoon, which was now given up to study in the British Museum,

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and that often kept him up hard at work into the small hours of the morning.

Lancelot had remonstrated with him urgently for this piece of needless labour, but had always been answered by an enigmatic smile.

"You wait a bit, Lance," he said; "don't you be in such a hurry to condemn me. You just wait till the twenty pounds it will bring me comes in, and then we will see what happens."

Russell's eyes always brightened when he talked in this way. Lancelot knew by this that he had some cherished project in his head, which would some day be revealed to him, and he was content to wait until the day arrived; yet all the same he did wish that it did not involve Russell in such a press of hard work.

"I say, old fellow," began the boy suddenly, "I wish you'd come with me to the Carmichaels to-morrow. Do now; there's a good fellow. Donald is always saying, 'Bring your brother, if he'd care to come.' Donald likes you awfully, you know; and to-day he said that his brother Fred—the eldest, you know—would be at home. He thought you'd like him. Do come, Russell."

Lancelot spoke with eagerness, watching his brother's face with some intentness as he did so. Yes, there it was, that peculiar, indescribable look, that was always called up there by any mention of the name of Carmichael. The boy had observed it many times before with a growing sense of curiosity; and

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as his intimacy with these two school-fellows, Donald and Fritz Carmichael, increased, he had noticed more and more how oddly reserved Russell always was whenever he spoke of them or of his visits to their house. It was not so in the case of other friends that he made, only with these particular people.

Sometimes he had coaxed Russell to come with him when he had been asked to bring his brother to tea at the houses of his other schoolmates; but he had never yet succeeded in getting him to cross the threshold of the big, comfortable mansion in Iddesleigh Gardens. He had always some good excuse at hand—an excuse given with a peculiar and involuntary reserve of manner that struck Lancelot as being distinctly odd, and gradually convinced him that he had some feeling towards the people there of which he was altogether in ignorance.

"My dear boy, I can't possibly. It's very kind of young Carmichael to ask me so often, but it's out of the question. I must spend every hour of the afternoon at the Museum."

"Hang the Museum!" was Lancelot's response.

Russell laughed at his vehemence.

"I'm very glad you have somewhere to go. A little change is good for you."

"Oh, I'm all right enough; I get plenty of change. It's you who never go anywhere or do anything but work, work, work from morning to night. I'm

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awfully afraid you'll knock up, one of these days, Russell. Do take a little holiday, just now and then."

Russell smiled and shook his head.

"I don't think I should know what to do with a holiday, as you call it, if I had it, old boy," he said. "I'm happiest at my books; and there is no fear of my knocking up — I'm as tough as our worthy landlady's beefsteaks!"

"I don't know; sometimes I think you are thinner than you used to be. But do come, Russell, just this once. I've a particular reason for wanting you to."

Russell eyed him with a sort of covert keenness of which he was instantly aware.

"A particular reason?"

"Yes; it may be the last chance we shall either of us have of being asked there."

"How so?"

"Oh, because the eldest sister is coming back from Australia or somewhere almost directly, and Fritz says that when she is 'boss' they don't know what things will be like; very likely they'll not be allowed to ask their friends just as they please, or go on in the jolly free way they are used to now. So you see, Russell, it may be now or never: do be a good fellow for once and say you'll come."

But Russell only shook his head.

"It isn't a question of will, Lancelot; I can't come; it's impossible."

Lancelot looked at him with sudden intentness.

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"Look here, Russell: I believe if it were any other house you'd go like a shot, if my mind were set upon it. It's only because it's the Carmichaels that you are so resolute."

The two brothers exchanged glances in silence. For the first time in his life, Lancelot had absolutely insisted on trenching upon what he pretty well knew was looked upon by Russell as forbidden ground. He was rather flushed, but he asked boldly,—

"Is it not so?"

Russell was silent a moment, then he asked with a little restraint of manner,—

"What makes you think so, Lancelot?"

"I have noticed it ever so long—ever since we came to the school and found the Carmichaels there. You didn't seem at first quite to like my knowing them at all, but as we got chums by force of circumstances, you said no more and let me go and see them; but you never will come yourself, and you always have an odd look when I talk about them. I can't think what it can be, for you can't possibly know anything against them or about them, as we've always lived abroad. Don't be so close; there's a good old fellow. Do tell me all about it."

Russell was leaning back in his chair in a sufficiently negligent attitude.

"My dear boy, you magnify molehills into mountains. You are quite welcome to go as often as you like to see your friends; but I really have not the

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time for visiting, and I can't begin going to any fresh houses. I know nothing whatever about the Carmichaels, except what is in their favour. I have every reason to think highly of them all, but they are wealthy and fashionable people, altogether out of our sphere; and when you are as old as I am, you will perhaps understand better than you can do now how a fellow of my unsociable tastes and habits shrinks from entering into a sort of unequal friendship with people like that, however pleasant personally. I daresay there is a good deal of false pride mixed up in my feelings—luckily for you, you don't suffer from that ailment—but I can't help it if there is. I don't mind going to some of the fellows' houses, but don't ask me to the Carmichaels again."

Lancelot's face cleared somewhat; he thought he had grasped the situation now.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" he said. "Now I understand. Why didn't you explain before? I began to think there must be a mystery somewhere."

Russell was still leaning back in his chair. His face was very grave and set; a sort of pained look had settled upon it; his eyes rested upon the bright face of his boy-brother with an odd kind of yearning tenderness.

"Lance," he said presently, "you remember our mother, do you not?"

"Why, of course, Russell, of course. Why do you ask such a question?"

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"Do you remember her last charge to you?"

Lance nodded.

"And do you ever think about it?"

The boy raised his clear blue eyes and fixed them upon his brother's face.

"Why do you ask, Russell? What is the matter with you to-night?"

"Sometimes old memories, old feelings come upon me very strongly, Lancelot," he answered, speaking in low, earnest tones. "Tell me, what was it she said to you? Let me see that you have not forgotten."

The colour rose in Lancelot's face, but he looked fearlessly at his brother as he answered in a low voice,—

"She told me I must never, never forget to pray; that I must take for my motto the words 'Watch and pray;' that I must always remember to pray that I may not be led into sudden temptation. That was what she said," answered Lancelot, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "but I don't think I know quite what she meant."

Russell's face still wore its strange expression.

"And do you do so, Lance?"

"Sometimes."

"Not always?"

"Sometimes I forget."

"Forget to pray, or forget that special prayer?"

Lancelot's face flushed a little.

"Both, I think," he answered candidly.

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Russell held out his hand with one of his rare smiles, full of mingled sweetness and sadness.

"Try not to forget, Lance, my boy," he said; "try not to forget any more."

Before Lancelot could make any rejoinder, a knock at their door interrupted the conference between the brothers, which had taken such an unexpected turn.

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CHAPTER III.

MISS SEFTON.

"COME in," said Russell hastily.

The little maid-of-all-work made her appearance in answer to this summons.

"If you please, sir, the lady what lives downstairs —dining-room floor, you know—would take it kind if you would spare her five minutes, if not too busy. She says, shall she come up to you, or will you come down to her? I was to say ever so many things beside about trouble and kindness and that sort 'er thing; but it's all gone out of my head, that it has."

Lancelot stole an amused glance at his brother.

"What is the lady's name, Martha?"

"She's called Miss Sefton. I b'lieve she's a governess or some'at of that sort. She's out all day pretty much as you are. She ain't been here very long."

"Give Miss Sefton my compliments," said Russell, "and say I will do myself the pleasure of waiting upon her at half-past nine, if that will suit her." And

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as the girl disappeared, he stretched his long limbs rather wearily and said,—

"What on earth can the old lady want with me?"

Lancelot's eyes were full of a laughing light. He was easily amused and interested by the trivial incidents of daily life.

"Looks as if you had made an impression upon the heart of the antique spinster, eh, Russell? We never got that kind of advance made us before, did we?"

Russell smiled, but looked a little annoyed too. He had never struck up an acquaintance in the house before, and he did not particularly care to do so now. He preferred only to know his fellow-lodgers by sight and by name.

"No; and I'd just as soon it had not been made now," he answered.

"Then why did you say you'd go?"

"Oh, I couldn't help that: one can't be rude to ladies, least of all when they are poor and elderly and dependent. Of course I must go; but I can't think what she can want me for."

"Well, I think I shall go to bed, if you're going downstairs," said Lancelot, glancing at the clock, whose hands were slowly approaching the specified hour. "This east wind makes a fellow sleepy. You won't be late turning in, will you, Russell? I hate you to sit up so many hours alone."

Russell patted the boy's head, and smiled reassuringly, saying,—

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"Oh, never worry about me. I don't need as many hours' sleep as you do, youngster. I'll take good care of myself, never fear. Yes, you go to bed and get a good long night of it."

"I wish he would take care of himself," said Lancelot softly to himself when he was left alone. "I don't care what he says. I know he works a great deal too hard; only I don't see how I'm to stop it. Oh dear me, I do sometimes wish we weren't so horribly poor! I wonder if this sort of thing will go on all our lives? Sometimes it almost makes one wonder what the good of life is at all."

But Lancelot was not given to quarrel with his fate very seriously, and he soon fell into another train of thought.

"I wonder why he spoke as he did just now? He hardly ever says a word about that sort of thing, though of course I know he is very particular and earnest and high-principled and all that himself. I don't quite understand it all. I don't really understand Russell himself always. Anyhow he's the very best brother that ever lived, and I'll never give him a moment's anxiety or bother if I can help it. And now I suppose I may as well turn in, for I am uncommonly sleepy, I know."

Meantime Russell descended the narrow, ill-lighted staircase, and sought the ground-floor rooms which the governess occupied. He could not imagine what she wanted with him, and he hoped she would not

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detain him long, for he was very busy, and every minute he spent downstairs must be taken from his sorely-needed hours of repose. Still he never hesitated about complying with the request that had been brought him. Had it come from some fine lady of wealth and station, he might have answered differently, but towards one occupying the position of his fellow-lodger refusal was impossible.

Miss Sefton was a thin-faced, gray-haired maiden lady of about five and forty, although she looked older than her years. Lines of care were traced upon her face, and her manner had a touch of timid, deprecating hesitancy, that betrayed an anxious temperament and a distrust of her own powers. She received her guest very gratefully but with a good deal of nervous tremor.

"It is so very kind of you, Mr. Graham. I'm sure I don't know how to thank you. You must have thought it so strange—a total stranger and new-comer; but I really did not know where else to turn, —only I am so afraid I am wasting your valuable time."

A half smile flitted over Russell's face. The nervous distress of his companion's manner had the effect of making him unbend more than was his wont. He saw that she mistook his gravity and instinctive courtliness of bearing for *hauteur*, possibly for offended pride.

"I am very glad you turned to me, if you think I

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can be of any use to you. Will you tell me what I can do for you?"

Russell's voice was peculiarly pleasant to the ear, low and mellow and deep-toned; his accent was very pure and refined; and his enunciation unusually distinct, as is often the case with people who have been accustomed for many years to speak a foreign tongue. He smiled as he put the question, and took the chair by the fire that Miss Sefton indicated by a timid gesture.

"It is so good of you to say so, for really I have no claim—quite a stranger, and a new-comer too. But I must not detain you needlessly, though you are so very kind. I wanted to ask you if you could give me a few hints about acquiring a better knowledge of the Latin tongue."

"Latin," repeated Russell, and waited for her to explain herself more fully.

"You see it is like this," pursued Miss Sefton, more at ease now that the ice was once broken. "I have three pupils to teach, two girls and a little boy of ten, whom I am expected to prepare for the school his brothers attend. I did not want to undertake boys, not feeling competent; but the situation was offered to me—they wanted an elderly person, the mother having lately died; and the salary is good, and I was thankful to get it. I have done my best with them all, but I am not comfortable about the Latin. The little boy tells me his brothers pronounce quite

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differently from the way I teach him; and they laugh at me, I know, behind my back, and think I don't know anything. Perhaps they are right: I know I am old-fashioned. It is years and years since I learned Latin, and they tell me they teach it a different way now—the pronunciation particularly I mean. Nobody has taken much notice, so far; but there is a new mistress coming almost directly, and sometimes I am so afraid that I shall never satisfy her, and shall lose my situation."

She spoke with such simplicity and good faith that Russell could not forbear a smile.

"That would be a great pity," he said, "just for want of experience in the latter-day pronunciation of Latin."

"Yes, that is what I feel," she answered humbly. "I should be very, very sorry to have to go. I am very comfortable there, and—well you know how difficult it is now to find employment in tuition, not for you, perhaps, with your talents, but for me it would be. Every one wants certificated teachers, who have passed examinations and so forth. I have no chance against the clever girls coming forward now with their classics and mathematics and sciences. Sometimes I feel a sort of fear that if ever I were to get stranded I should never get back into the stream again. I think but for that fear I should hardly have had the courage to trouble you; but you understand, perhaps, a little of my position now."

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She raised her eyes timidly to the young man's face, and saw there a look of such kindly, friendly sympathy that her heart took courage suddenly, and she said, as if he had spoken,—

"Ah, how good you are. I do not know how to thank you!"

"We are very much in the same boat, Miss Sefton," he said with a grave smile. "We are both struggling in the same current, and it might just as well be my fate as yours to be stranded and left behind, crowded out of the field—to change the metaphor—by the hurrying masses behind. Competition is terribly keen everywhere in these days, as I know by bitter experience, and may know again. People like ourselves should always be ready to help one another. If you will allow me the pleasure, I should like to be your teacher myself. I can, in a very few lessons, I think, teach you all you wish to know, and lend you books that will put you in the way of the modern methods of instruction. Shall we begin to-night?"

"O Mr. Graham, you are too good! I don't know how to thank you. Are you sure you have the time?"

"Yes, quite sure. Have you any book? Yes, that Cicero will do as well as anything." And drawing together to the table, the young master and the elderly governess commenced their first lesson.

"I'm sure I don't know how to thank you," said Miss Sefton an hour later, during which much en-

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lightenment had been vouchsafed to her, and a new grasp of the subject accorded. "I really don't; I don't indeed."

"Then please do not try," he answered with the rare sweet lighting up of his face that was less a smile than a sort of illumination from within. "It is a pleasure to be able to be of assistance to a fellow-labourer in one's own field. You must let me come some other evening and go on with the subject."

Something almost like tears glittered in the spectacled eyes of the governess. Poor thing! she had known so little of disinterested kindness and true sympathy in her hard, toilsome life.

"I don't know what to say," she answered huskily. "It is too much, to take up your valuable time."

"Not so very valuable yet, unfortunately," answered Russell. "Very well, that is arranged then. Will it suit you to receive me again on Friday evening at the same time? I will look out a few books between then and now which I think you may find useful in grounding your pupil."

"I don't know how to thank you—I don't indeed," repeated Miss Sefton. "I feel now as if I could master the difficulty, as if I need not be so afraid to face the new lady of the house. I don't know whether she will be learned, or whether she will take any interest in the children; but they all seem to think that everything will be upset, and I think that has made me nervous."

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Russell smiled a little. He was half-amused, half-compassionate at this naïve explanation of her position in her employer's house.

"Well, we must hope for the best," he answered. "At least we will do our best to prevent the Latin being the stumbling-block. Good-night, Miss Sefton. You will see me again on Friday, all being well, if that is convenient to you."

And Russell shook hands in a friendly fashion and departed, not before his companion had managed in her hesitating way to say,—

"And I hope, I trust, that if ever it is in my power to do any little service for you or for your brother, you will give me the great pleasure of commanding my services. It would be a favour for which I should always be grateful."

"You are very good to say so," answered Russell. "Well, more unlikely things have happened than that we may be able to help one another. Good-night again, Miss Sefton."

Russell climbed the stairs again with rather a warmer feeling at heart. After all, there is something pleasant in being able to do a good turn for a neighbour, or exchange a kind word with another lonely, hard-worked fellow-creature. He did not crave the society of friends or care about making casual acquaintances, but on the whole the present experiment had not been unsuccessful, and he was very glad to think he had been able to help any one

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who stood in need of some such assistance as he had been able to offer.

He was too busy, however, to indulge his thoughts many minutes; and it was past two o'clock before he closed his books for the night, and turned with a gesture of weariness towards the dying fire in the grate. He was chilled and cramped by sitting so long in one posture, and he stirred up the glowing embers to try and get some warmth into his tired frame before turning in. He fell into a reverie as he sat by the fire, and presently his thoughts framed themselves into half-uttered words:—

"I must keep myself better in hand about those Carmichaels. I had no idea the boy suspected anything. I would not for worlds that he should get at the right clue. I never meant to betray the least feeling upon the subject. It will never do for him to get hold of the idea that there is a mystery. He is growing older, and will not submit to be treated like a child much longer. I wish I could keep him always as he is. I dread the day which I suppose must come, when he will begin to ask questions about our father. I don't know how I shall evade them when he does; but I cannot bear to think that the shadow should extend to his life too. Well, well, it is no use anticipating evil. One can only try to do right and leave the rest. With his gay, facile temperament, he may never wake up to the consciousness that there is anything behind of which he is kept in ignorance.

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But, O Lancelot, Lancelot, with that temperament be very careful. It was just that that was our father's best and worst gift—his happiness and his ruin. You do not know or understand why it was that our mother gave you those words for your motto, 'Watch and pray.' But I know; ah, do I not? God grant you may use them to better purpose than others have done under stress of strong temptation."

He paused awhile in deep thought; then his mind took a new bent.

"And so she is coming home at last—the little Vera I used to know so well, my playfellow and friend and childhood's ideal. Ah well, we are not likely to meet; I must take care of that. And yet she would never, never know me, were we by chance to stand face to face. I was but a boy of twelve when I saw her last. I must have changed too much for recognition to be possible."

He rose and stood before the greenish mirror that distorted rather than reflected the objects opposed to it. It occupied the space above the mantle-piece, and gave back a picture of a thin, pale face, with large, dark, sad eyes, weary from perpetual toil and care; so different from the gay, bright boy's face of fifteen years back, that Russell could not forbear a smile. He took from a locked drawer in his writing-table an embossed silver case of massive and delicate workmanship, and opened the leaves that folded down the centre. Thus disclosed was a miniature painted

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on ivory—a boy's face, peculiarly handsome and attractive, a dark-haired, bright-eyed, beautiful boy, with refined, delicate features, and the glow of health upon his cheeks, and sunny buoyancy of expression well delineated in the fearless brightness of the eyes and in the smiling sweetness of the lips. It was a strong face withal, unusually strong for a mere lad. Russell looked at it long and earnestly. Round the rim in letters of gold was the name "Arthur Russell Gordon." He looked from the picture in his hand to the face in the mirror above and smiled again.

"No, I think I need fear no detection. I can hardly trace the resemblance myself; and that was like me, I believe, though no doubt a little idealized. Decidedly I am safe. It is something to be certain of that. I am not likely to meet her. I shall avoid the house more rigorously than ever. But if chance should bring us together, at least I think I need not fear. Vera Carmichael will never recognize in Russell Graham the Arthur Gordon of her childish days.

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CHAPTER IV.

AN ARRIVAL.

"SHE'S come, I say! she's come!"

"Who's come?"

"Vera of course. Fred's just brought her. I saw them get out of the carriage; and then I came to tell you."

Donald and Fritz and Lancelot Graham were amusing themselves over some carpentering work in their schoolroom, when Madge came rushing in with this piece of intelligence. The boys looked up with varying expressions of countenance. Donald was the first to speak.

"I suppose we must go down and see her."

"Oh, I don't know. She's got Fred and Raby, and I think Tiny and Bill were watching for her in the hall. She may just as well get used to them before we all go."

So said Madge, who was feeling just a little bit shy at the prospect of meeting this unknown elder sister, indignant as she would have been at any such sug-

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gestion. The boys undoubtedly shared this feeling. They stopped their work but made no move towards the door.

"I suppose you don't remember your sister?" said Lancelot, who was watching this little scene with some interest.

"Oh, I remember her in a kind of a way," answered Donald. "I was seven when she went, and Fritz was six. We can remember her in a sort of a way; but it doesn't seem to make her any more our sister now. It seems so odd;" and he laughed a little.

"I don't remember her at all," said Madge. "I was only four, and Willie was a baby, and Tiny wasn't born. I think sisters should either not go away or else keep away. I don't see the fun of their turning up like this, when every one's forgotten them and nobody wants them."

Lancelot laughed. Madge's little tempers always amused him.

"I should have thought it would be rather nice," he said.

"Ah! you don't know anything about it. You've had no experience of sisters."

"I want to know why she's come to-day," cried Fritz, breaking in unceremoniously. "She wasn't to have turned up till to-morrow."

"No, but a telegram came, just after you'd gone to school, saying the ship was in, and Fred started off straight; and now she's come."

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"And I think we ought to go down and see her," said Donald.

Madge looked at him sharply.

"No, Don; don't forget the compact."

"All right; but she hasn't invaded our rights yet. One can be civil to start with, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, civil; only mind you don't go over to the enemy."

"I should laugh if it turned out that she was not an enemy at all," he said.

But Madge shook her head, as if that suggestion were quite beyond the mark. Before anything more could be said the door opened and Willie appeared.

"Fred says you're to come down," he announced with an air of importance. "Vera's come, and she wants to see you all."

"Have you seen her?" asked Madge eagerly.

"Oh, rather. I hope *I've* some manners," answered the child with cool assurance.

"Well, and what did you think of her?" asked Fritz.

"I call her a first-rater," was the ready reply.

"She seemed nice, did she?"

"A1," answered Willie gravely. "She's a great deal prettier than Raby, or you, Madge, or most people. I think she's something like a sister. Why don't you go and see for yourselves?"

"That would be the best way," said Donald. "Come along!"

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He led the way, Fritz and Madge following. Willie looked up at Lancelot.

"Won't you come too?"

"Oh, they won't want me," he answered laughing.

"Never mind if they don't. Let's come along and see the fun," said Willie, who was very fond of Lancelot.

"You go along. I'll stay here."

"I can't leave you all alone. It wouldn't be polite. Do come. I'll make it all right."

Lancelot laughed and submitted. He was rather curious to see this elder sister of whom he had heard so much, and he was not troubled by any feelings of shyness or self-consciousness.

It was in the dining-room that the introductions were going on. As Willie and his companion entered, Lancelot heard a very sweet voice say,—

"And is this Donald, little Donald, grown such a big boy; and Fritz not much behind—Fritz, who used to be as round as a roly-poly, and *such* a mischievous little monkey! You see I remember you better than you remember me.—Fred, how delightful it is to see them all again! No photographs ever give one the least idea of people, children especially; and as for this little new mite who did not exist before I went away, we have so much lost time to make up that we shall not know where to begin."

This was in allusion to Tiny, who was clinging to Vera's hand, and trying hard to get another kiss from

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the lips that spoke so sweetly and smiled so lovingly. Little Tiny felt as if the unexplained blank left by the mother's death had suddenly been filled in the most wonderful and satisfactory way. She could not have explained the feeling, but she was perfectly well aware of it.

But Vera had turned her head and seen Willie and his companion.

"Well, and who is this?" she asked; "not another brother, surely, whom I have forgotten?" and she held out her hand with so sweet a smile that Lancelot blushed with pleasure.

"I've no business to be here, Miss Carmichael," he began in a tone of apology; but Willie promptly interrupted him.

"I made him come. He's a great friend of ours. He goes to school with Donald and Fritz. I'm going there too, when I'm a little older. He's called Lancelot Graham."

Vera smiled, and the lad's face glowed.

"I feel as if I had seen you before," she said. "Your face seems familiar somehow. You have not a brother in Tasmania, I suppose?"

Lancelot shook his head.

"He's only got one brother," cried the communicative Willie, "and he is a master in the school; but he isn't a bit like Lance. They live together near here. I should think it was rather jolly."

"Now, Vera," said Fred, "you must be tired.

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Raby will show you your room, and then you shall have some tea quietly in the drawing-room. You must quite long to be out of all this hubbub."

"Nothing of the kind," answered Vera sweetly. "I think they are all much too quiet. I believe you are all just a little—what shall I call it?—shy of me. Fancy being shy of a sister! Who ever heard of such a thing?—Aren't they silly boys, Lancelot? You wouldn't be afraid of me in their place, would you now?—Yes, I will go and get rid of some of this railway dust; but no drawing-room tea for me, please. I should like to join the big social schoolroom party, please, for I'm as hungry as a schoolboy, and shall thank nobody for egg-shell cups and wafer bread and butter."

And holding out her hand to Madge with a gesture that could not be withstood, she followed Raby from the room, casting a bright, smiling look at the boys as she did so.

"Did you ever live here, Vera?" asked Tiny, as the four sisters climbed the stairs together.

"No, little one, never; you will have to introduce me to everything in due course. I have forgotten such a lot of things about London since I went away. I shall be such a country cousin you will all be quite ashamed of me."

Madge's mouth, which had been set rather grimly, relaxed into a little smile.

"I thought you'd come home to manage everything

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and everybody," she remarked with a sidelong glance at her sister.

"What a very unpleasing office!" answered Vera with a smile of genuine amusement. "What a managing person I should have to be! Is this my room? what a pretty one! Are you sure I am disturbing nobody else? How I do like to hear the roll of the carriages again, and to feel the tumult of a town about me! I think I must be a true Cockney at heart. It feels so home-like to be in London once again."

Certainly Vera was not in the least like what had been expected, and Madge was content for the present at least to lay down her arms. She busied herself in unlocking her sister's cabin portmanteau, and in pulling out the dress for which she elected to exchange the dusty travelling costume she wore. Raby poured hot water into the basin, and both sisters waited upon the new arrival with interest and some assiduity.

"How nice this is!" said Vera at last, pausing to kiss each in turn. "You can't think how hungry I have been sometimes all these years for a little bit of sisterly love and companionship. An aunt is very nice and kind and good, but she cannot take everybody's place. One feels to want somebody besides; and now I have got so rich all in a moment, I am almost bewildered."

Raby and Tiny responded readily to the advances made to them; but Madge held a little more aloof,

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though not in any obvious way. She was not quite sure if she liked quite so much "gush," or trusted the sweetness and affection of the new sister. She wanted a little time to think before she accepted Vera's proffered friendship.

The tea was ready downstairs by the time the sisters descended; and the boys were in their places waiting with hungry impatience for their food.

"Where will you sit, Vera?" said Raby. "This is your right place, you know," indicating the head of the table, where the urn hissed and spluttered.

"What! do you expect me to make tea for nine thirsty people, when I am so hungry and thirsty myself? No, thank you, Raby. I mean to sit here and enjoy myself;" and she took a seat between Donald and Lancelot. "Nothing like getting by gentlemen; I shall expect to be waited on beautifully in such company."

At least there was no stiffness about the first meal that Vera took in her father's house with her newly-found brothers and sisters. She had plenty to say even if they were quiet. She told them about the voyage, the funny people she had met on ship-board, the talking parrot that one of the sailors owned, and the captain's tame monkey that never left him night or day.

She told also a little bit about her life out in Tasmania—what she did, and how people lived out there. They all listened with interest, and at the close of the repast Tiny ventured to say,—

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"I think if you like animals so much you will love our dear Bill."

"And who is dear Bill?" asked Vera, smiling.

"He's Fred's Bill, but I love him just as if he were mine. He's in the den now; I shut him up there lest he should frighten you. Will you come and see him, please?"

"It sounds rather fearful, certainly," answered Vera, laughing a little as she followed the child; "but I suppose I had better get the introduction over early."

Tiny watched with some anxiety the impression mutually produced upon each other by dear Bill and his new mistress. To her great satisfaction, they seemed to take to each other from the first, and nothing could exceed Bill's anxiety to testify his confidence and affection.

"You don't think him *ugly*, do you, Vera?" asked Tiny anxiously. "Some people do, you know; but he has *such* a sweet smile."

"He has a sweet temper at least, which is the best recommendation. And you know 'handsome is that handsome does.' According to that reckoning he is quite beautiful."

"I'm so glad you think so. I do. I think he's got a *lovely* face; dear, dear Bill. You won't make him live in the mews, will you?"

"Why should I? Where does he generally live?"

"Here, in Fred's study, or in the garden; and he

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goes out always with me, if he isn't out with Fred. But Miss Sefton is afraid of him; she would like him turned out of the house. Please don't say he must go, Vera. I should miss him so."

"Indeed I won't, then, little one. I like a dog about the house myself. Your dear Bill shall not be doomed to the stables by me."

"Oh, I am so pleased. I do love you, Vera, and so does Bill too. See how he smiles! *Wouldn't* you like to kiss him?"

Vera laughed, and patted the dog's head.

"Kisses will keep for another day; we must go back to the others now. Who is Miss Sefton?"

"Our governess."

"Are you fond of her?"

"No, not very. She isn't *interesting*."

Vera laughed softly.

"What is interesting, Tiny?"

The child look up gravely.

"I don't know how to say it, but I feel it," she said. "You're interesting yourself, Vera. I think you are lovely."

"Like dear Bill," answered Vera, with another soft, sweet laugh. "But tell me, is Miss Sefton kind to you?"

"Oh yes, she is kind; but Madge says she is not clever—Madge makes fun of her often. She is never cross, but she doesn't make lessons interesting, like mamma used to do when she taught us."

By this time they had got back to the dining-room

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again. The boys had vanished, but Raby and Madge still lingered about over the fire, and as soon as Vera appeared they suggested going upstairs "to have a talk."

Vera consented willingly, and very soon the sisters were comfortably ensconced round her bed-room fire, quite prepared to be communicative even on this very brief acquaintance.

"Were you talking of Miss Sefton?" asked Madge. "I wish you'd give her the sack, Vera."

"Give her what, dear?"

"Oh, send her away, you know. I hate governesses. I want to go to school like the boys. There are plenty of jolly schools for girls all about, where they learn all kinds of things, just like boys. Willie might just as well go to Dr. Robertson's now; and I could go to a high school; and Tiny could come with me, or Raby could teach her a little while, or you perhaps, till she got older. Do think about it, Vera. Papa never has time to attend to things when we ask him. He always says he will think about it, but I don't believe he ever does."

"Well, I will think, certainly," answered Vera with a smile; "but we must not be in a hurry to change anything just at first. You must give me time to get used to the house and its ways before we alter any existing things. I must see what I think of Miss Sefton and her teaching before I decide. Does she come every day?"

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"Yes, but she's not coming for a week now. Raby let us have holidays because you were coming."

Vera glanced at the other sister, who flushed a little, she hardly knew why.

"They teased me so," she said half apologetically, "and I thought the poor thing was looking tired. And they only had a week at Easter; it fell so early this year nobody cared about going away."

"And what do you do yourself?" asked Vera. "Do you study with Miss Sefton?"

"Oh no! I have finished my education. I am eighteen, you know."

An odd little smile played round Vera's lips, but she made no comment. Madge began to suspect that she was mentally taking their measure all round. She was not sure if she did not rather resent it.

"Vera," she said abruptly, "I want to know if I may dine late like Raby when there's nobody else here. It's so dull upstairs when the children have gone to bed and the boys are busy with their lessons. I asked papa, and he said I must wait and ask you, he didn't know about such things. Do let me; I should so like it."

"I should like it too, but we must wait for it until you are a good many years older, Madge," answered Vera, with a smile that did not detract from the decision of the reply. "You will grow up quite fast enough as it is, without anticipating your emancipation before the proper time. It's a great deal nicer to be

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a little girl as long as possible, than to be a half-and-half young lady long before the right time. You will have to wait until your emancipation from the schoolroom raises you to the position you covet so much."

Madge's face was rather overcast; she had fancied she should obtain an easier victory over this sweet-spoken sister.

"But at least you shall dine to-night with us, in honour of my arrival, if you have got a suitable frock; and I think it is almost time we were thinking of dressing, for I want to be downstairs by the time papa comes in."

Madge went slowly away to the room she shared with Raby, her sister following after a brief delay.

"Well," said the latter, "she seems nice. She is sweetly pretty. I think her eyes are lovely; and she is so distinguished-looking—I wish I were like her." And Raby glanced at her own rather ordinary pretty pink and white face reflected in the glass, and shook her head with decision. "I shall never be in the least like her—it isn't my style a bit."

Madge was pulling off her frock rather roughly.

"I don't care about her looks—they're well enough, of course; but I'm not so sure about the other things. At first I thought we should just turn her round our fingers, but I'm not at all sure if we shall after all."

"One can't tell how things will be yet," answered Raby with less animation than Madge had shown.

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"But she has some lovely dresses, although they are all black, as she is in mourning for Aunt Mary. She says that she has some pretty things for us when her boxes come. I think we shall like her, though it's too soon to judge yet."

Madge was less sanguine; out of the influence of Vera's personal charm, she was less than ever inclined to be pleased. She could see that her sister possessed a good deal of penetration and resolution, and she was not quite certain that she liked it.

"Anyway, I hope she will have the sense to see through Miss Sefton and send her away," she muttered. "I hate being taught in that silly, old-fashioned way. I want to go to school and be with other girls. It's so dull only to have the children to learn with.—I say, Raby, did you notice how she smiled when you said you'd finished your education?"

"Well, I have," answered Raby placidly. "I don't see anything to laugh at there."

"Well, you'll see presently what Vera thinks," answered Madge laughingly. "It's my opinion she will try to send you back to the schoolroom too."

"Oh, she couldn't," returned Raby calmly, "for I shouldn't go."

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CHAPTER V.

VERA.

"WELL, Vera, my dear, it is pleasant to have you at home again," said Mr. Carmichael as he joined his eldest son and daughter in the drawing-room shortly before ten o'clock, after the younger members of the family had retired. "We have all been looking forward very much to your coming, particularly Fred and myself."

Vera smiled sweetly.

"Not more than I have been doing, I am sure," she answered. "It was very lonely out there after Aunt Mary died; but I could not get away all at once."

"To be sure not; there is always much to arrange after a death. You did not tell us in your letters about the disposition of your aunt's property; but I suppose she has made you something of an heiress, eh, my dear?"

Vera smiled a little without at once replying.

"She and your mother were co-heiresses with forty thousand pounds each," continued Mr. Carmichael;

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'and at the time your aunt begged to adopt you as her own child, when her health broke down and she was ordered away—for life as it has turned out—there was a sort of understanding that you were to reap some solid advantage from the arrangement. She never appeared to make other ties. I suppose you have come into something considerable, Vera. Your aunt could not have lived up to her income out there, I should think."

"She lived very comfortably. We had a large establishment. Still she must have saved. She has left fifty thousand pounds. Half of that is mine."

"And the other half?"

"I am the trustee of the other half. I have to find the person, if I can, to whom it is willed. If after a certain number of years the search is unavailing, it is to be dispensed to different charities."

Mr. Carmichael raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"What a curious will! But your aunt was a peculiar woman, rather. Who is to be the recipient of this fortune, and why is he not forthcoming?"

Vera was silent, thinking deeply, gazing into the fire.

"Father," she said suddenly, "have you ever heard anything of the Gordons, since—since *that* happened?"

His face looked grave and serious.

"No, never, Vera."

"And yet you tried?"

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"I tried very hard to trace the widow, and your aunt did the same. She was deeply attached to Mrs. Gordon. We all esteemed her very highly; but search proved quite unavailing. I am certain she kept in hiding purposely; because she could hardly have failed to see our advertisements, yet there was never the least response. But, my dear, what has that got to do with your aunt's will?"

"This much," answered Vera, "that it is to her godson, Arthur Gordon, she has willed the other half of her property. I am the trustee, and on me devolves the responsibility of finding him if I can."

"Whew!" whistled Fred; "a fortune like that ought to draw. Have you tried advertising?"

"My aunt in her lifetime did so often, without any result," answered Vera. "I don't believe advertisements will do it. She said that mother and son were alike in their intense pride, and in the acute pain and shame they must have felt at what their husband and father had done. I can remember Arthur—what a handsome boy he was—I was so fond of him; and I know he was just as proud as a prince. Aunt Mary said that Mrs. Gordon came of a very old family; that her people all cut her upon her marriage, and would have no communication with her. I suppose all that made it harder still for her. I don't wonder she ran away and hid herself."

"I never really understood the rights of that affair with Mr. Gordon, sir," said Fred, addressing his father.

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"I was such a little chap when it happened. I wish you would tell me what it was."

Vera too looked as if wishful to hear the tale from his lips; but he was less ready to tell it.

"It is always a painful business to recall," he answered. "However, I will give you a brief outline of the affair. Gordon and I met in a casual way early in our married lives, and a sudden, rather unusually warm attachment sprang up between us. You cannot think what a handsome, brilliant, fascinating fellow he was, and as warm-hearted as he was delightful socially. We both had some money, and we resolved to go into partnership together. We bought a small mercantile business from a firm rather on the decline, and by our energy and the capital behind us we managed to push our way and get on with very fair success. As years passed, fortune continued to smile upon us: we did not do any great wonders, we did not coin money, as they say, but we made progress, and we were satisfied. I at least was satisfied, but it seems my poor friend was not. He wanted to reach wealth and affluence at one bound. He was sanguine and rash by nature, and liable to act upon sudden impulse rather than upon deliberate consideration. Well, well, I need not go into detail; it is needless, as you would scarcely understand, and it is painful to me to recall that time. I went abroad for six months with my family for rest and change, leaving Gordon in sole charge of the business. Shortly before

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my return would have taken place, I was summoned home by a telegram from our cashier. I came back to find the business all but bankrupt—and Gordon dead. He had been tempted to wild, reckless speculation—had lost; and—it is most painful to think of—in his remorse and despair his mind had become unhinged, and he had taken his own life rather than meet me when he believed that he had ruined me."

Mr. Carmichael paused. Vera was silent; she had heard the outline of the story before. Fred remarked presently,—

"But you never were ruined?"

"No; perhaps that is the most painful part of all. We were not ruined. Your mother's fortune, which had lately come to her, kept us above water during that anxious crisis; and when I had time to go thoroughly into matters, I found that despite my poor friend's rashness, one or two of his ventures had been successful, and went far to retrieve the losses made in other quarters. In point of fact, had he but stayed to see the results, he would have found that he had not seriously crippled our resources; but I suppose he felt the criminality of his conduct—for he always rushed to extremes, and, I doubt not, would look upon himself as an absolute swindler and thief—too keenly to weigh anything fairly or truly. I doubt not that it was under a sudden impulse of temptation that he first tampered with securities not legally his own; and again under an impulse of horror and despair his

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mind became temporarily clouded, and he laid violent hands upon himself. It was a most melancholy business. It pains me even now to recall it."

"It is awfully sad," answered Fred. "But about the widow and the boy—it was not their fault."

"Indeed no; but, as Vera will remember, Mrs. Gordon was the proudest as well as the sweetest of women, and sensitive to the last degree. I blame myself now for not making a point of going to her at once, without losing a moment; but I felt diffident in my wife's absence, of intruding upon her in her grief. I waited until your mother could return and take that office upon herself; and in the meantime she had disappeared utterly and entirely, without leaving a trace behind; and no efforts of ours, and we made many, ever succeeded in obtaining the faintest clue to her whereabouts."

"That is just what Aunt Mary said," remarked Vera. "She loved Mrs. Gordon like a sister, and was dreadfully distressed at her cutting herself adrift like that. She was very much attached to the boy too; she had even then, she tells me, some idea of making him her heir."

"And she has done so now, in fact, but without the least idea where he is to be found. You have rather a difficult trust before you, Vera."

She smiled confidently.

"Oh, I am very sanguine," she answered; "I am convinced I shall find him. The world is not so very

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large a place after all, and I am not going to be beaten easily. I shall wait for a few months, till I have got settled down and have matured my plans, and then I shall set to work. I always think that where there's a will there's a way."

Mr. Carmichael made a sigh of assent.

"Quite right, my dear; nothing like courage and confidence to make a way in life. Well, I will help you all I can with this strange trust of yours. I'm sure nothing would please me more than to find the son of my old friend, and his widow if she is living."

"Aunt Mary did not think she would be alive," answered Vera. "She felt almost certain that the sorrow and the shame would so prey upon her that it would shorten her life. I cannot help fancying the same from what I remember of her."

When Vera and Fred were left alone together, Mr. Carmichael having retired to his study, the latter said musingly,—

"Rather a queer bit of business altogether, Vera. I wonder if you will succeed?"

"I mean to," she answered smiling.

"Were there any other children besides Arthur?"

"Aunt Mary says there was a baby not many months old, born whilst she was abroad with us, before the catastrophe; but she can't remember if it was a boy or a girl. Other things came and put it out of her head. She does not know, of course, whether it even lived to grow up."

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Fred mused awhile; but the story of the Gordons was less engrossing to him than other themes.

"What do you think of them all, Vera? How do you think you will get on?"

She smiled brightly.

"I mean to get on very well. It may be a little difficult sometimes. I can see my own warm temper in one or two of them at least; but I don't mean to stir it up if I can help it."

"Have you a temper, Vera?" he asked smiling.

"My dear boy, where is your memory? To be sure I have—a little black 'monkey' of my own, as Aunt Mary used to puzzle me by calling it. I can see myself all over in Madge when she puts up her head and looks all defiance. But I mean to win their hearts first, and all the rest will follow."

"It will be such a comfort to have a mistress at the head of affairs again," said Fred. "You can't think how demoralized the whole household has got."

"I see it in part already. Well, I will do my best, Fred dear; and I shall have a loyal ally in you. That will be half the battle."

Yet although Vera spoke bravely and hopefully, her face was rather grave as she stood before her fire that night. The home to which she had looked forward so many months was, after all, a strange place, and she could not entirely get over the feeling that she was a stranger in it. She was pleased to feel herself in her father's house once more; but she knew quite

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well that her life would not be altogether a bed of roses just at first. She saw the signs of little clouds already in the domestic sky, and knew that however she might wish to love these newly-found sisters and brothers, they might be slow on their side in reciprocating the love, or in giving their confidence to one who was coming to institute changes and reforms that might not all at once be palatable.

Yet despite the gravity of Vera's face a little smile soon lighted it.

"Surely I am not down-hearted already," she said to herself, "with so many to love around me, and my dear Fred and that sweet little Tiny all my own already. I must try to be very wise and gentle with them all, to be patient and understanding and considerate. I must ask our Heavenly Father day by day for grace and guidance, for wisdom to direct my steps, and for help in everything I do. I wonder if they have learned to love Him too? At their age I was little given to serious thoughts; they have come later, with experience of life and the knowledge of my own weakness. Dear children, if only I can help them as Aunt Mary helped me; if only I can be a good sister to them, and never, never, by harsh or hasty words, set them a bad example or betray the cause I have pledged myself to serve! Yes, I must pray more earnestly than ever. I shall want all the help that I can get; but that help will never be asked in vain. Ah, what a wonderful feeling that is—never asked in

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vain! I must be a coward if I am afraid after that. Oh no, I will not be afraid. I am certain I shall be able to win them."

Vera's confidence was never shaken for a moment. Her house was built upon the rock, and she knew it would stand firm; and yet, as days passed by in the new home, she became aware that the position forced upon her, as eldest daughter and mistress in her father's house, was not to be a very easy or agreeable one at first.

There were no open ruptures during the first few days. The boys were pleasant and cheerful, the girls rather inclined to hang about their sister and make much of her; but Vera was well aware of a certain undefined lawlessness and want of order that she knew she should have to check in time. Boys and girls did not keep to their own quarters; they strayed at will all over the house, burst into the drawing-room in dirty boots and with unkempt heads, and in fact did exactly as they pleased, secure in the immunity from grown up visitors that had fallen upon the house ever since their mother's death.

Raby had no authority to put down these easy ways; Miss Sefton was a mere cipher out of the schoolroom; and Mr. Carmichael was so little at home that he had no idea how order and propriety were being set at defiance and his house turned upside down by his big sons and high-spirited daughter.

Vera's first act of authority was to bring back Miss

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Sefton, cutting short the needless week of holiday that had been granted by Raby. She was anxious to see the despised governess for herself, and on the third day after her arrival she set out one afternoon to call upon her at her own home.

She had meant to go alone, but Tiny begged so hard to be allowed to go that she and dear Bill were included in the party. If Tiny had her four-footed companion to chatter to, she would never notice the conversation carried on by the seniors, and Vera could talk at ease to the governess without any danger from the child's presence.

But when they reached the street of dull houses where Miss Sefton lodged a sharp shower made them hasten their steps, and they were a little disconcerted to find that the lady was giving a music lesson in her room, and could not see them just then; so at least the maid said without making any inquiry.

"How long will the lesson last?"

"Maybe ten minutes longer."

"Oh, then we will wait," answered Vera. "Can we stand here, as it rains so fast?"

Her pleasant face and voice won Martha's good opinion all at once.

"Tell you what, miss: you walk upstairs. It's cold here, but you can wait in second-floor lodgers' room. They never comes back till five o'clock. This way, please."

Vera was willing enough to leave the draughty

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hall, and mounted the stairs with Tiny, Bill paddling at their heels.

"You are quite sure we shall be in nobody's way?" she asked as the girl flung open a door.

"Quite sure. Lodgers never in till five."

"Thank you; then we will wait. You will let us know when Miss Sefton is at liberty."

"All right, miss."

And Martha shut the door without so much as putting her head inside. Had she done so she would have seen by the cheerful blaze of the fire that somebody must be at home; for the brothers never indulged themselves with any needless luxuries, and never lighted their fire till they came home in the evening. As it chanced that day, Russell had been dismissed from his afternoon's teaching by Dr. Robertson, who had some work he particularly wanted done by him that afternoon. So the young master had come home early, and had been hard at work till about ten minutes ago, when he had been obliged to go out to obtain some more paper of the particular size required.

Martha, however, knew nothing of this, and the two intruders sat enjoying the warmth of the fire, quite unconscious of the proximity of the owner of this domain. Presently the girl came up to say that Miss Sefton was now at liberty. Vera rose, and glancing at Tiny, who was sitting on the rug, her arms round Bill's neck, she said,—

"I almost think, dear, as Miss Sefton does not like

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dogs indoors, that you and Bill should stay here. I shall not be long, and I will come for you when I am ready to go."

Tiny was quite content with this arrangement. She was quite safe with Bill, and this odd-looking room rather fascinated her.

When Vera had gone she got up from the floor and began peeping about, after the busy, curious fashion of children. Presently she mounted on the high fender, and regardless of the close proximity of her short skirts to the blaze of the fire, she tried to take stock of the various articles upon the mantle-shelf.

Tiny's frock was already smoking, when she was startled by the sudden opening of the door. A tall young man burst suddenly in, and the start given by the child almost precipitated her into the fire. Indeed the dress had just caught the flame; but before there was time for any harm to be done, Tiny found herself caught in a pair of strong arms, and the smouldering fabric was crushed together before it had time to ignite. All danger to Tiny was over in a second, but not so, unluckily, for her preserver; for Bill started up with a savage growl on seeing his little mistress thus roughly used, and springing upon the bold intruder, he made his strong teeth meet in one of the hands that had been laid so unceremoniously upon the child left under his charge. He caught and pinned the assailant and held him fast.

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Bill's angry growl first aroused Tiny to a knowledge of her favourite's conduct.

"Oh, he's bitten you!" she cried, horror-struck. "Oh Bill, Bill! let go this moment! Bill, do you hear? Let go, you naughty, wicked dog! Oh dear Bill, do *please* let go!" and casting her arms round the dog's neck, she pleaded with him so successfully that his fierce teeth relaxed their hold and he let his prey escape, still, however, keeping a sullen eye upon him, as if hardly satisfied now of his honesty.

"Oh Bill, Bill! how could you?" cried Tiny, really frightened. "You never did so before. You never bit any one all your life. And I was getting my frock on fire, only the gentleman put it out. Oh Bill! it was naughty of you. You ought to have known better. You have made me so ashamed and unhappy. What will they say at home?—Oh dear! oh dear! I do *hope* he hasn't hurt you very much. Please, do forgive us both!"

And for the first time Tiny ventured to turn her head and glance timidly at the gentleman who had been so badly treated by Bill.

He was putting a glowing coal back into the fire with the little pair of tongs, and his brow was drawn together and his face rather pale, the child thought; but as she looked up with this appeal for forgiveness on her lips and the tears in her blue eyes, he smiled so very kindly that Tiny was sure he was not angry.

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He sat down by the fire, wrapping his hand up in his handkerchief.

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered, holding out his other hand towards her. "Your dog was quite right to defend you. Is his name Bill? Do you think he will make friends with me, now that he sees I am not going to hurt you? I like dogs, and they generally like me, only I don't usually have to behave so roughly to their little mistresses."

Tiny had let herself be drawn towards him, and stood at his knee, looking up wistfully into his pale, pleasant face.

"Didn't he hurt you dreadfully?"

"No; now you mustn't trouble yourself over that any more. Will you tell me, please, how you came here—you and Bill? It was not to see me, I think?"

"Are you the lodger belonging here?" asked Tiny gravely.

He smiled and nodded.

"We didn't come to see you. We came to see my governess, Miss Sefton, downstairs. The servant said we might wait here, because she was giving a lesson and the lodgers didn't come in till five. Then sister went down alone; she said Bill and I might stay here by the fire. She's coming up for me soon. Shall I go away now? Am I in your way?"

Russell smiled and put his arm about the child. He could not tell why, but there was a strange

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pleasure in looking into her blue eyes and hearing her childish talk.

"No, don't go. Let us wait till your sister comes for you. So Miss Sefton is your governess, is she?"

"Yes; do you know her?"

"I know her a little."

"The boys laugh at her; but she is kind to us—only she isn't interesting."

Russell could not help laughing.

Tiny looked up at him gravely.

"Everybody laughs if I say that; but it's quite true. Some people are made interesting, I think, and some aren't. You're one of the interesting ones, I think." She scanned his face intently, adding presently,—

"And Bill bit you. I am so sorry!"

Bill had awoke now to the consciousness of his own error, and came up very humbly with his apologies. Russell received these readily, and made many speeches of forgiveness at Tiny's dictation, because "Bill understood everything, and would never be happy till he was *sure* he had been forgiven." His spirits, however, revived when he found he was not to be beaten and was no longer in disgrace; and time slipped away fast as Tiny related anecdotes of his prowess and his many perfections, to which her new friend listened with all due gravity and attention.

At last the door opened and Vera appeared. She stopped short upon the threshold on seeing the group beside the hearth.

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Russell rose to his feet, and Tiny rushed forward crying eagerly,—

"Oh Vera, Vera! my frock nearly got on fire, and this gentleman put it out; and dear Bill thought he was hurting me, and he bit him."

Vera cast a startled glance at the young man. Russell had turned so exceedingly pale that it was no wonder she thought him more injured than was really the case. The pain in his hand had no connection with the sudden whiteness that had overspread his face as soon as he found himself confronted by his little friend's sister.

"I am so very sorry—I cannot express how sorry I am," she said in tones of gentle and sincere concern. "I do not understand. What was it that happened? Please do not stand; indeed, you do not look fit. I am afraid you have been badly hurt. How shall I apologize for this intrusion upon you?"

Russell recovered himself by an effort.

"Indeed there is nothing to apologize for. It is a mere chance that I came here before my usual time. The girl was quite right in making use of my room. Your sister's frock was a little in danger of catching fire when I came in, and my rather rough handling of his mistress naturally annoyed the dog. It is nothing—a mere trifle—not worth a thought. Please do not trouble over it any more."

"But he bit him, oh so hard!" cried Tiny. "And I couldn't make him leave go anyhow at first. He'd

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got him here—right in the middle of his hand. I think his teeth must have met. And see my frock, Vera; it is all burned round the hem. I should have been on fire if he hadn't come—and Bill hurt him!"

Vera turned once more to the young man.

"I don't know how to thank you, or how to express my regret at what has happened. I am more concerned and grieved than I can say."

"Then please forget it as fast as you can," he answered with a grave smile. "I shall do the same myself."

Vera was about to say that her brother, the dog's master, should call to make his apologies for the accident, but something in the young man's manner and bearing restrained her. He was perfectly courteous and kind, but there was a certain reserve and dignity in his bearing that she felt without being able to define. She made her adieus with her usual grace and self-possession, but she was conscious of an odd feeling of constraint to which she was usually a stranger. She did not understand it, and was glad it did not communicate itself to Tiny.

The child ran up to Russell in the most fearless way, putting up her mouth for a kiss. His pale face flushed as he bent down over her, yet there was a peculiar tenderness and gentleness in his manner, as he kissed the little upturned face, that was not lost upon Vera.

"I do *hope* he hasn't hurt you much. It was so

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kind of you to keep me from getting on fire, and for forgiving Bill when he asked you. Are you sure your hand isn't very bad?"

"My hand will very soon be well," was the low-toned answer as Russell followed them downstairs to open the door. "You are not to think any more about it—you are just to forget."

"I shall not forget you," answered Tiny, and she was almost asking him his name, only she was not sure if Vera would think it quite proper. "I expect she knows," she said to herself. "She's big enough to know everything."

"Wasn't he nice and kind?" she asked as she took her sister's hand in the street. "Oh, you don't know; he was different when you came in—all stiff and grown-up, 'company manners' Madge calls it; but before that he was so nice. I like him ever such a lot. Who is he, Vera dear?"

"I don't know, Tiny."

"Don't you? Oh dear! I wish I'd asked him. Hadn't he a nice face?"

"I think he had," answered Vera, adding to herself, "and a very sad one."

"I know!" cried Tiny suddenly. "We'll ask Miss Sefton; she will know."

Vera had thought of this herself.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

RUSSELL sat over his work that night trying hard to keep his mind fixed upon it. Dr. Robertson had been urgent that it should be finished if possible that day, and yet never had the young man felt less disposed for work. His head ached badly, and his hand was excessively painful. He had been more hurt by the dog's strong teeth than he wished any one to know, and more unnerved by the sudden sight of Vera Carmichael than by any physical discomfort. Altogether he was entirely out of tune for work, and laboured on at his books and papers with a sense of weary oppression that threatened to master him at length.

Lancelot, his own work done an hour ago, a boy's story-book open in his hand, cast many anxious glances at his brother's worn, white face, and only kept silence by a great effort.

He had been much concerned, on his return home, to find Russell with his hand all swathed up; but his

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brother was oddly reserved and uncommunicative on the subject; all he would say was that a dog had bitten him, and that it was nothing, and he had shown just that tendency towards irritability and shortness of manner that, as Lancelot well knew, indicated a tension of mind he must not increase by needless chatter or persistency.

He knew that Russell was suffering—knew it by the difficulty with which he worked, by the knitted brow and pale cheek, and by his repugnance to food at tea-time. He was always miserable when his brother ailed anything, it was so difficult to make him take any care of himself; and, boy as he was, Lancelot knew well enough that a dog's bite was not a thing to be trifled with, and sometimes led to very bad results.

At last he could stand it no longer. Russell might be angry, he did not care. He was resolved to act on his own responsibility. Slipping quietly from the room before his brother was aware of his movement, he ran softly downstairs and knocked at the door of the medical student who occupied the drawing-room floor of the house.

He knew Mr. Wells by sight perfectly; they always exchanged friendly nods and greetings if they chanced to meet on the stairs or in the street. But for Russell's invincible reserve the boy would have scraped acquaintance with the pleasant-faced young student long ago.

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"But I don't care now," he said to himself. "I'll do it whether he likes it or not. He's no business to complain, seeing he is so thick himself with the old lady downstairs;" and hearing himself bidden to enter, he went in without hesitation.

The owner of the room was smoking a pipe, with his feet elevated on a chair and a book upon his knees. He looked surprised to see Lancelot, but smiled pleasantly enough.

"Well, youngster, what do you want?"

"I want to know if you'll come upstairs and look at my brother's hand. Some brute of a dog has bitten him, and he won't show me the place or do anything. He looks quite knocked up with it; but he'd be so furious if I got a doctor to him that I don't like to try it on. If you'd just come and see if there's anything wants doing, I should be so much obliged."

The young man rose at once.

"To be sure I will. Bites are nasty things sometimes. I've no doubt, though, I can dress it so as to lessen the pain." He hunted two or three things out of a drawer. "When did it happen?" he asked, as they mounted the stairs together.

"This afternoon; but I don't know how. He's been very close about it, and he's so busy I haven't liked to bother him much."

Mr. Wells smiled; he had a pretty good notion how the land lay. He had not studied Russell's dark,

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thin face for nothing all these months, although so far the fellow-lodgers had hardly exchanged a word. He agreed with Tiny in her verdict that the young schoolmaster was "interesting."

Russell looked up in great surprise at the appearance of this intruder.

"Good-evening," said Mr. Wells pleasantly. "Your brother tells me you have been bitten and need a little doctoring. I can't boast qualified skill, and medicine is more my line than surgery; but I've no doubt I can do something for you if you'll let me try. I've got something here that I think is certain to relieve you."

Lancelot half expected a curt refusal, or at least a drawing back, and a very distant and haughty response to such overtures. He was therefore considerably astonished when his brother rose at once, and said, "This is really very kind of you. Lancelot had no business to bother you; but since you are so good as to come, I shall be very glad if you can do anything for me. It's a tremendous hindrance to work, even a lame left hand;" and he unwound the handkerchief from the injured member.

The medical student examined the wound.

"A nasty place," he said: "the brute must have had a pair of strong jaws of his own. Feels as if he'd broken a bone. You've had the place cauterized, I see."

"Yes."

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"And disgracefully badly done too."

Russell laughed a little.

"That's my fault. I did it myself, not knowing anything about the dog."

"Oh, you're one of that kind, are you? No wonder your hand hurts you. Well, I'll soon make things better for you; but you must obey orders for to-night."

"What orders?"

"You must put all these books away and go straight to bed, and I promise you a fair night's rest. You must take things quietly for a day or two. Keep your arm in a sling, and don't overwork yourself any way. To-morrow you must not attempt to go out. You must not get up till noon."

"That's all bosh," said Russell; "I can't do it."

"You can and you must," answered the other young man quietly. "Your brother shall take a letter from me to your head-master. He isn't a Turk or a tyrant, I suppose. He'd rather you stopped away a day now than a week later. You must keep quiet for four-and-twenty hours at least, or your arm will inflame all up, and you will have no end of a bother with it. Your hand is twice its natural size as it is. I can't tell if the bones are all whole. You keep still and do as I say, and to-morrow I'll bring one of our fellows back with me in the afternoon—one of our qualified dressers, and he shall overhaul you and see if you're all right. If not, he can set a

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little bone as well as any ordinary surgeon, and you'll have no fuss or bother with doctor's visits.—Look here, you boy—Lancelot, isn't your name?—just get him to bed quick, and I'll have him easier and asleep in no time."

Russell submitted with a docility that showed his brother very plainly how knocked up he must feel by this time. Lancelot was very proud of his diplomacy and success; and when, before leaving his brother last thing, Russell looked up to say drowsily, "Thanks, Lance; I'm sorry I was so cross to you; you've been very forbearing, I'm sure,"—he felt that he had indeed reaped his reward.

"Nothing like doing what comes into one's head," he said to himself triumphantly. "Russell is always reading lectures against acting from impulse. If I hadn't done so to-night, he'd have been pegging away at his horrid old books now and just ready to drop. He's not always quite so wise as he looks, after all."

Next morning, a good night's rest having done him all the good in the world, Russell felt so much better as to be restrained with difficulty from going out as usual. The combined entreaties of his brother and medical neighbour withheld him from this attempt, however; but he obtained leave to get up at noon and continue his interrupted work of the previous evening.

"I shall only fret and fume in bed," he said; "and Dr. Robertson wants the work done quickly."

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"All right, then, so long as you don't overdo it; and this afternoon I'll bring somebody better qualified than myself to look at your hand."

Russell made a grimace, but raised no objection. He had a shrewd notion that something had snapped when "dear Bill's" teeth had met in his palm, although he had forgotten it afterwards, and if such were the case he knew that skilled aid would be necessary. He thought it very kind of Mr. Wells to take him in hand, yet was half-reluctant to permit it, knowing that he could offer no fee to him or his friend. However, the thing was done, and could not be undone. Common courtesy prevented him from rebelling now.

He rose about noon and got to his work. Martha brought him up some good soup, which she said she had been ordered to do; and Russell swallowed his pride and his dinner together, wondering why it was that it was so difficult for a poor man to accept favours graciously. If he had had a thousand a year it would be easy enough to do it.

He was glad enough, however, of the food, and it did him good. He was conscious of feeling weak, and his head had already begun to ache. Still he got through the work he had in hand, put it all ready for Lancelot to take to Dr. Robertson as soon as he should return, and then he sat beside the fire in a comfortable chair, glad almost for the first time in his life, to do nothing but rest.

He dozed a little by the comfortable warmth,

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dreamed between waking and sleeping of the little golden-haired visitor of the previous day, the innocent chatter that had fallen so naturally from her lips, and the sweet kiss she had imprinted upon his before leaving. Russell had in his heart a very tender feeling toward children, and this little blue-eyed maiden had won his love from the first. Why was it that she was a Carmichael? that this little episode must be forgotten, must lead to no nearer acquaintance? For once in his life, Russell would have liked to feel that he should see his little visitor again, renew the friendship so oddly begun, and listen to the innocent prattle that had been like music to his ears. As it was, however, this must not be. He must contrive that the incident led to no closer acquaintance with these people. It was a very odd coincidence that had brought them once more together, and the young man crushed down, with a sense of angry scorn, the strong wish he felt rising within him to see again the beautiful face of Vera Carmichael, the child-playfellow he had loved with all the loyalty of a warm, boyish heart, and whom he had recognized the first moment his eyes had rested on her, even after all these years of absence. She had changed of course, matured and developed into even more than the promise of her childhood's beauty; but it was the same sweet face, tender and true, and loving and sincere. How well he remembered it! How he longed to see her again, to hear the accents

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of her gentle voice, and read the indications of interest and sympathy that shone in her beautiful dark eyes. But he chid himself angrily for such weakness. She had forgotten him, and he must forget her, and conquer the old affection that lingered still in his heart. It was only because he was seedy, he told himself, that he was so foolish; he should be all right again when this passing feebleness had gone.

He heard steps upon the stairs; not Lancelot's bounding tread, but a heavier footfall and the sound of voices. Next minute his solitude was invaded by his neighbour from downstairs, who had brought, as he had promised, his friend with him.

"So you are up, are you? Well, a wilful man will have his way. You don't look much to boast of yet. Here's my friend come to have a look at you. He's a half-blown surgeon already, quite one of our showmen. Let's have a look at you," undoing his bandage skilfully enough. "There we are now.—A nasty-looking hand, eh, Carmichael?"

"I'm afraid I hurt you, then," said the other young man, looking up, for he felt a start from the hand he held. Russell's face, with its sudden flush of colour and odd expression, confirmed his suspicion. "I'll be as gentle as I can; you must sing out if I hurt you too much."

"It isn't that," muttered Russell not very intelligibly, adding to himself under his breath, "*Kismet!*"

He watched the face of the young fellow narrowly,

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trying to recall in its traits the unformed features of the little Fred he remembered in bygone days. There was something in the eyes and in the general contour of the face that was familiar, but he would never have recognized his former playfellow, and felt perfectly safe from recognition himself; but the odd chance that had brought Fred Carmichael of all men to his rooms on such an errand struck him as something more than an ordinary coincidence.

"There's a bone broken, sure enough," said Fred. "The brute knew how to use his teeth. My dog bit a fellow yesterday.—By-the-by," he added, looking up suddenly, "were you that fellow by any chance? Did you get bitten by saving my small sister from being burned in your room?"

"Something like that," answered Russell. "Was it your bull-dog, then?"

"Yes; and a proper good hiding he got, too, last night. I hate a dog that is not to be trusted; but I assure you he never bit any one before."

"He had plenty of provocation that time," answered Russell. "I was laying very violent hands upon your little sister."

"I'm awfully sorry, though," said Fred, looking up with genuine feeling in his honest face. "I'd have given anything for it not to have happened. However, you must let me do all I can to mend the mischief now. But I wish you hadn't burned yourself so savagely. The dog was all right."

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"Yes; only I didn't know anything about him, and one likes to be on the safe side. A little burn is nothing."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes," answered Fred, and went to work to repair the damage that his dog's teeth had done.

"There," he said at length, with a touch of satisfaction in his voice. "I think my boss would say I'd made a very neat job of that; and you look as if a good glass of port wine would be the best thing for you."

"Oh, I don't want anything, thanks," answered Russell hastily; and Mr. Wells, knowing quite enough of his fellow-lodgers to suspect that wine was not likely to be found in their larder, went quietly downstairs and returned with what was wanted.

Russell flushed deeply, but he took the glass and disposed of its contents quietly. It did him good, and gave him strength and animation to talk with his guests naturally and without effort.

"You must stay at home for a day or so," said Fred, with an air of authority. "You want looking after a bit. Who is there here to do it? Are you quite alone?"

"He's got a brother—a capital lad; and I'll give an eye to him," said Mr. Wells kindly.

"Only I can't stay at home," said Russell; "I've got my own work to look after."

"Oh, bother your work—health first, work afterwards. Look here; it's Friday now. You must

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positively stay in to-morrow and Sunday. By Monday, I daresay, you will be ever so much better; but it's folly running risks of inflammation and all that by persisting in being obstinate."

Before any reply could be given Lancelot came dashing in.

"Oh Russell, it's all right. Dr. Robertson didn't mind a bit. He said you were quite right to take care of yourself. He took your classes himself.—Hallo! *you* here, Mr. Fred? Why, what is it that has happened? Are you the fellow Mr. Wells said he would bring to look at Russell's hand?"

"And are you the brother of the man my dog bit, whom I am brought to attend? I say the plot thickens. —Why didn't you tell me your friend's name, Wells? I'd no idea it was any one I knew anything about."

And a good deal of laughing and talking went on as matters were explained and Lancelot learned that it was Fred Carmichael's dog that had bitten his brother, when the sisters had paid a visit to the rooms yesterday; and that the young man had been brought to look at Russell, not knowing in the least who he was, or that he was Lancelot's schoolmaster brother. They were mutually amused at the revelation.

"I say, Russell, why did you keep it dark? Why didn't you tell me who had been?"

"How could I? They did not tell me their names."

"Ah no; but if you'd said a little girl and a bull-dog called Bill, I should have known fast enough. Well, if

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you've got to be bitten I'm glad it's not by a strange dog. What fun it should all turn out like this!"

Russell was of another opinion. He would rather it had been any other dog in London. His head was throbbing violently with suppressed excitement and annoyance. He was afraid of being betrayed into some unguarded remark that he should afterwards repent. He was confused and distressed and unable to keep things clear.

"Look here!" cried Fred with a sudden inspiration; "I know what will be best. As he's not a stranger but your brother, Lancelot, you just come home with me, both of you, till Monday. We should all be awfully glad to have you.—I could keep you under my own eye, you see," he added, turning back to Russell again. "And really, after the way my dog mauled you, you ought to give me the satisfaction of putting you on the highroad to recovery. My sister would be very much pleased, I know, to see you. Will you excuse an informal invitation and come? You're not fit for work, but a little society would do you good. Now be a good fellow and say you'll come."

"Do, Russell," urged Lancelot; "it would be so awfully jolly for us both."

But Russell's face had put on a look that Lancelot well understood. He knew the case was lost as soon as he saw it there.

"It is exceedingly kind and hospitable of you to wish such a thing," he answered, speaking very quietly

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and deliberately; "but I am not quite up to visiting, and must prefer the solitude of my own room. Take Lancelot, by all means, if he would like to go; but I must ask you to excuse me."

There was something so final in the tone that Fred did not persist.

"Well, I'm awfully sorry you can't; but, of course, if you feel seedy it is no kindness to press you. You must come some other time, when you are more yourself. As for Lancelot—"

"Oh, I'll stay with Russell, thanks," answered the boy quickly; and nobody disputed his decision.

"I'll look you up to-morrow some time," said Fred, holding out his hand. "I'm awfully sorry about the whole business."

"You really need not bother any more," answered Russell, who would gladly have dispensed with more visits from any of the Carmichaels. "I am exceedingly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken over me already. You have made me much more comfortable, and I think I shall do very well now without any further medical attendance."

Both medical students laughed at this broad hint, and Russell smiled himself.

"You must excuse me if I sound ungracious. I am very grateful, but I hate giving needless trouble to any one."

"Well, we will not persecute you more than we can help," answered Mr. Wells; "but as I am such a

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near neighbour, and as it was Carmichael's dog that did the mischief, you can't complain very bitterly of our visits."

And then the young men went out together.

"Awfully poor and awfully proud, you know," said Mr. Wells as they reached his rooms. "It's always the way with people of his type."

"He wants feeding up; he's in a low sort of state. I suppose I couldn't send him a dozen or so of port, could I? I hate to think of his wanting anything like that when it's my dog that has hurt him."

Wells shook his head.

"You couldn't possibly do that. He's not the kind of fellow one could help. I wish he were, for port wine is what he wants. But it would be no good. He would not accept it. It would only make awkwardness."

"Couldn't it be sent anonymously?"

"He'd guess directly. It would never do. You can see for yourself the kind of fellow he is. One admires that sort of resolute independence, but it's very tiresome sometimes."

"Yes. I must talk to my sister," said Fred. "She is the one to hit on some plan. I wish he would have come home with me. She could have managed him, I know."

"Well, I'll keep an eye on him, and you can do so yourself. I quite understand your feelings; but you can see for yourself that he is rather a difficult subject."

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CHAPTER VII.

THE DIFFICULT SUBJECT.

IF Russell were, as Mr. Wells had expressed it, a difficult subject, he was certainly a sufficiently uncomfortable one all the next night and day. He had a good deal of fever hanging about him, and he rebelled against the feeling of illness, as strong men will do when forced to succumb for the first time in their lives. He was very much worried by the strange chain of events that had mixed him up with the Carmichaels—just the very people he was most anxious to avoid; and being in a low, feverish state, he was unreasonably troubled by trifles, and made himself worse by the fears with which he harassed himself that he should be recognized in spite of all changes—known as the son of the man that had so defrauded the friend who trusted him as a brother.

It was this thought, this fear that haunted him all the night following Fred Carmichael's visit, and robbed him of anything like quiet sleep or rest. It disturbed him far more than the pain of his hand,

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though that was sufficiently severe; and as a natural consequence he rose unrefreshed, and so obviously unfit for his duties that he submitted without any great show of resistance to Lancelot's determined entreaties, and consented to stay at home one more day. It was a half-holiday at the school, so he could be the better spared.

He tried to work when Lancelot had gone, but gave it up in despair. He was very much annoyed by his restlessness of mind and collapse of strength, and a little uneasy too. He began to wonder if there could be any truth in his brother's warning, whether he might not be taxing his strength a little too severely. But then if he did not work hard, what was to become of them? As it was, even with unremitting toil, he was only just able to keep himself and his brother in the moderate comfort of their present home. He had never been able to save against a rainy day, earnestly as he had striven to do so. Even now, it was most difficult sometimes to replace worn-out coats or boots as fast as was necessary, and he shivered to think what an illness might mean to them if it should ever be his fate to break down. It was not that he was at all alarmed about himself for the present. He was confident that a short spell of rest would set him up completely and the Monday would see him at his post as usual. It was only that he had a dim perception from his own feelings, combined with the words of the medical students, that he was

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not in as satisfactory a state physically as a man of his age ought to be, and that he was more pulled down by a trifling accident than he would have been a year ago.

It was this consciousness that had awakened in his mind a train of very serious thought; but after a while the drawn brow unbent, and a look of calm serenity replaced the anxiety that had clouded his face before.

"Am I losing my faith, after all these years?" he asked of himself, as he lay back in his chair gazing at the patch of sunny blue sky visible above the slates of the opposite houses. "I asked Lancelot the other day if he remembered our mother and her teaching; surely I am not forgetting it myself. Had she not always a deep, unwavering trust in God's goodness, in His Fatherly love and guidance, even in the darkest hours? and I am sure it never failed her. And has it ever failed me? Have we ever really known want, near though we have sometimes been to the knowledge? Has He not always supplied the daily bread? Has He not smoothed our way and made sufficient for the day the evil thereof? I may have been forgetful, but He has never forgotten. And after all that goodness am I to doubt Him now? Not if I can help it. I will—I do trust Him always, even though clouds should arise and the way look very dark before me. He will not forsake us. He has promised. His promises can never be forgotten."

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Russell fell into a deep fit of musing. Presently his thoughts reverted to another subject.

"She used so often to tell me, to remind me of those words which say that it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. She used to say it to comfort me when times were very dark, and the oppression of that dreadful secret seemed to crush one's very life out. She used to say then, and how gravely and earnestly she spoke, that if our father had known more of trouble and sorrow in youth, had learned lessons of self-control, and had conquered his impulsive temperament, he might never have yielded to sudden temptation and have brought ruin upon himself and others. I remember it all so well—how she used to comfort me by telling me that I was learning life's lessons young, bearing the yoke in my youth, and that some day I should see the wisdom and goodness that had ordained it so, and should be thankful for the discipline that seemed so hard at the time." Russell sighed a little, as if he had not quite been able to realize the benefit of it yet. The yoke still weighed him down somewhat heavily; it was difficult to feel as yet that the burden was sent in love. "She used to be far more anxious about Lancelot—sunny Lance, who never felt poverty or trouble, who made all the brightness of our home, as he does still. 'He has his father's temperament,' she would so often say. 'Watch over him, pray for him, help him, but do not shield him too much. Let him learn a little of the

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deeper lessons of life, its hardness and stern reality. Do not bear the yoke entirely on yourself; let him take his share. It will be better for him, too, to bear it in his youth.' These were some of her words as she lay dying. Have I kept her charge? I cannot tell; at least I have prayed for the lad and watched over him. He has shared my troubles in as far as one of his happy disposition can do. Nothing saddens or depresses him; that at least I cannot help rejoicing in. He is never weighed down by anxiety or care. He is happy, and enjoys his boyhood, although his surroundings would make a less buoyant temperament restless and dissatisfied. It may not be the best preparation for life's battle, but I would not have it otherwise. I know too much of shadow myself; I want him always to walk in the sunshine. God grant him a happy life and a prosperous one. May He watch over and guard him and keep him safe, and grant that our mother's fears on his account may never be realized. May the lad never forget that his watchword is to be, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.'"

A more restful look had settled upon Russell's face. The quiet stillness of the afternoon was soothing to his jaded nerves. Lancelot he had sent out for a walk. Nobody would be likely in his absence to disturb his solitude. Tired out with his bad night and anxious restless thoughts, he fell into a light sleep beside his fire, and must have slept somewhat more

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soundly than he was aware of, for when at length he opened his eyes he saw that he was not alone.

Donald Carmichael was standing in the window looking down into the street; blue-eyed little Tiny, a great bunch of violets in her hands, was sitting opposite to the sleeper, steadfastly regarding him; whilst Bill sat upright before the fire, looking as harmless and innocent as the cast of his countenance would allow, a little bit sheepish in reality, remembering his offence of two days ago and the chastisement that had followed, but eager to show himself friendly and repentant now.

"You've awoke!" cried Tiny, jumping up and crossing over to him, holding up her face for a kiss. "I hope I didn't awake you with staring. Please tell me if your hand is better. I did so cry when Fred came home and said Bill had broken it.—Bill, come and say how sorry you are.—He is sorry; you would see he was if you knew his looks as well as I do. He's always sorry and ashamed when he puckers up his nose like that. Fred did beat him so hard when I told him what he'd done. It did make him *so* sorry. He's sorry still; he is indeed."

Russell laughed and patted Bill's head.

"Oh, Bill and I made it up before, you know."

"Yes, I know. It was so good of you to like him after he'd hurt you. I've brought you some violets. Would you like them? Vera thought you would. Violets are her favourite flower. We got them for

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you this morning. Aren't they sweet?" and the child held up her fragrant burden for him to inhale its sweetness.

Then Donald stepped forward.

"How do you do, sir? We're all so awfully sorry about your accident. Fred was almost ready to shoot Bill, only we begged him not, because he really didn't understand, and thought he was protecting Tiny. He says he will, though, if he ever bites any one again. He is coming to see you this evening; but he is busy all day, as to-day is his surgeon's taking-in day. My sister wanted to know how you were getting on, and Tiny begged to come and see you, so I said I'd take her and ask. We're all awfully sorry you're so seedy. I hope you will be all right soon."

Donald spoke in the frank, straightforward fashion natural to him. He had pleasant, easy manners, and had always liked Russell, who was his pronounced favourite amongst the masters at his school. He and Lancelot were chums, too, which made the attraction all the stronger.

"I am very much better, thanks, Carmichael," answered Russell. "It is really nothing to trouble any one about. Your brother has put me to rights very kindly, and there is not any need for him to waste his time any more on my account. Please tell him so. I am quite sure I shall do very well without any more doctoring."

"Oh, I'll tell him, sir, directly if you like; but I

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know he'll come all the same. He likes doctoring, you know, especially surgical cases; and as it was his dog who chawed you, I don't see what he could do except try to mend the mischief."

Russell gave it up. It seemed his fate. For years he had been afraid lest some untoward incident should arise that should throw him into some sort of closer acquaintance with the Carmichaels. Things had gone so smoothly for a time that he had almost begun to forget his fear, when all in a moment the very thing he had dreaded had come to pass, and he was, so to speak, at the mercy of the whole family.

"We should have been so glad if you would have come and spent Sunday with us," pursued Donald, who evidently came well primed for his part. "Do you feel disposed to change your mind to-day? It would please us all awfully if you would."

Tiny was standing beside Russell holding his uninjured hand.

"Do come!" she pleaded, "do please come. I want you to, and so does dear Bill, and Vera, and Fred, and everybody. Do come home with us; it would be so nice. I'd show you my dolls, and my books, and my rabbits, and everything; and Vera would take care of you and make your hand quite well—she and Fred would, I know, because they're so kind and so clever. Do come, please do!"

It was harder to resist the child's pleading than anything else; but Russell was resolute.

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"I can't do that, thanks," he said to Donald; "but I am very much obliged to you for wishing it. It is exceedingly kind of you."

"Kind to ourselves then, sir, for it would be a pleasure to us all to have you and Lancelot," answered Donald laughing. "I wish you could see your way to it. You shouldn't be bothered about anything if you were seedy."

But Russell shook his head.

"I'd rather be at home, thanks all the same. I've got so out of the way of visiting that it's difficult to make up one's mind to it; besides, I'm better keeping quiet up here really."

"Well, I expect you're seedier than you will admit, if that's the case," was Donald's reply. "Oh, and that reminds me Vera wants to know if there is anything you could fancy that your precious landlady isn't up to making. Miss Sefton gives one the idea that she isn't up to much; and we rather pride ourselves on our cook. She fancies herself immensely, and loves doing things nobody else can do. Vera didn't know how you could be asked anything like that; but I said I'd ask. Isn't there anything now we could send you? Lancelot says you don't take anything hardly."

"Lancelot maligns me then," answered Russell, who, however, was in no wise hurt or embarrassed by this advance—it was made with such perfect good faith and simplicity. Nobody but Donald would have ventured upon such delicate ground; but he saw nothing

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difficult in it, and showed it so plainly that it would have been impossible to take offence. "It's exceedingly kind of you all to think of such a thing, but I really do not want anything of the kind. Lancelot is a capital cook. He can always supply Mrs. Norris's deficiencies. Besides, I am not on the sick list; I am only indulging myself with a holiday."

"Well, I don't know; you look tolerably like a hospital patient, with your sling and your pale face. However, you'll let us know if you want anything, won't you?"

"Thanks very much; but I shan't want what I can't get here."

Donald laughed.

"I wish I always got what I wanted as easily. Well, I'm glad you're no worse; Vera will be glad too. Good-bye, sir. I hope we didn't disturb you by coming in. We would have waited if we had known you were asleep."

"Oh! are you going already?" cried Tiny. "I wanted to stay much longer. I haven't said anything. I wanted to tell him such lots of things.—Do come home with us! We could have such fun if you would!"

But Tiny's pleading was in vain. Russell only smiled and shook his head; and Donald carried her off still lamenting.

"Shall I tell Vera you liked the violets?" she called back as they reached the door.

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"I like them very much," he answered; "they are very sweet."

"She will be glad you like them: they really are her present, though she said I was to give them to you."

Donald shut the door quickly, laughing to himself as he did so.

"I say, Tiny, do you know what an *enfant terrible* is?"

"No."

"Well, it's something uncommonly like you when you chatter like that."

Tiny's eyes opened wide.

"*Enfant* means child," she said gravely. "Does *terrible* mean chattering?"

Donald laughed again silently.

"Something like it, anyhow. Don't you go and turn into a little pitcher."

Tiny was puzzled, but she kept her own counsel, turning matters over in her own mind after her own fashion.

"I say, Russell, old boy, you can't help knowing the Carmichaels now!" cried Lancelot with some triumph in his tone, when he returned and found out that another visit had been paid in his absence. "It's all very well your trying to hold aloof, but you can't do it much longer. You don't know what nice sociable people they are; and if you hold off and show that you don't want to have anything to do with them,

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they'll think it so awfully marked and queer. You'll have to come round a bit now—you can't help yourself that I see."

Russell's face was calmly resolute.

"I don't see that anything has greatly changed the face of affairs."

"Oh, don't you? Well I do, then. Their dog has bitten you; of course they want to make amends. They know something about us: they like me—at least I think they do—and the boys like you very much. Mr. Fred will come in and out till your hand is well, and of course he'll expect you to go and see him sometimes; and then we shall gradually get intimate, and it will all be very nice. I always did want to know those people. I like them better than any of the other fellows."

Russell did not argue the point. He had no wish to rouse Lancelot's suspicions, that were, as he was well aware, quite ready to awake.

"Well, you can go there as often as you are asked, at least. I must see what leisure I have before I begin any visiting. It is easier to make an absolute rule than to keep breaking it until people don't believe in it."

"Oh, you'll have more time on hand presently," answered the sanguine Lancelot. "I can't have you always working as you do now."

Next day being Sunday, Russell insisted on going to church with his brother, though he was decidedly

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recommended to stay at home and rest. He was surprised to find how much the exertion tired him; and he felt so knocked up all the rest of the day that he was not surprised at Lancelot's uneasiness about him. It brought back some of the thoughts and feelings that had been troubling him during the past days. He wondered if it might not be well perhaps to speak to his brother upon a difficult subject that had hitherto been sedulously avoided by both.

It was Lancelot himself who gave him the opening he half desired, half dreaded.

The brothers had finished their tea, of which Russell's share had been a mere sham, and he now lay back in his easy-chair looking very wan and weak. The boy cleared away the remnants of the meal, casting dissatisfied glances at his brother from time to time; and when he had completed his task, and had taken the chair on the other side of the hearth, he suddenly burst out,—

"I say, Russell, it's hateful to see you look like that. You know you're a great deal worse than you profess to be."

"I'm very tired to-night," admitted Russell, "but I don't think there's anything more wrong with me than that."

"But why should you be so tired?"

"Oh, I don't know. I've been pulled down a bit, I suppose."

"You've no business to be so pulled down by a

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little thing like that. If you'd been well before, you wouldn't have felt it like this."

Russell said nothing, and the fact that his brother did not scornfully contradict him increased Lancelot's disquietude.

"Do you feel the same?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know quite what I feel," was the reply. "I don't believe there's anything to worry over, so far; but I've been thinking a good bit in these last days, and I want to have a talk with you, Lance, my boy."

Lancelot's face was very grave.

"A talk about what, Russell?"

"Well, chiefly about your future."

"My future? And what about yours?"

Russell looked intently at the boy through his half-closed eyes.

"Lancelot," he said, "has it ever occurred to you what would become of you if—if anything were to happen to me?"

The bright colour left the boy's face; a look of distress clouded his eyes.

"Russell, Russell, what do you mean? You don't think—" he could not frame the question.

"No; I don't think so in the least. I am young and strong, with a sound constitution, and I should say that the chances are I shall live to be an old man yet. Still life and death are beyond any human calculation, and I think sometimes it is right to think

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and speak of possibilities that in the end need never be faced. I cannot help thinking often of such things. I do not fancy you do so yourself, Lancelot?"

The boy shook his head.

"You have the faculty of forgetting or putting aside what is not pleasant to think of," said Russell with a half smile. "Lance, my boy, that can be rather a dangerous gift sometimes, if it is not carefully used."

"I don't understand, Russell."

"Let it pass, then; you will know better perhaps as you grow older. Now, Lancelot, think a minute. What would you do, do you suppose, if you were to be left alone in the world?"

The boy shook his head despairingly.

"Starve, I suppose."

"No, you would not starve. I have insured my life for fifteen hundred pounds." (Russell did not say how hard it had been to spare the money to do so, how heavily year by year the payment of the needful sum weighed upon him as the time for payment drew near.) "That sum of money will be yours at my death, and upon the interest of that you can just live. You will have to exercise rigid economy, but you will be kept from absolute want; and in a few years' time you will be old enough to be earning a little towards your own support, if needful. Poor we always have been—poor we probably always shall be. Poverty is a hard thing sometimes, Lancelot; yet it is not that I dread for you."

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Lancelot was looking hard at his brother.

"What is it then, Russell?"

There was a long pause before the young man spoke, but Lancelot waited patiently.

"I do not know how best to express what I mean. I do not know if I shall make myself understood. Lancelot, life is full of temptations, full of snares and pitfalls. It is so hard to do right, so easy to do wrong; and there are so many, many ways of falling which are so insidious, so deceitful, one hardly knows where right ends and wrong begins. Ah, Lancelot, do you understand? Do you ever feel your danger—the difficulties of life?"

"I don't think I do, Russell," he answered frankly. "I don't think I understand what you mean. What is my special danger?"

"Sometimes, Lance, I think it is that you would be so easily led by any one you liked or trusted—and you might well like some one whom you should not trust: and again, there is always that special danger you know well yourself, of acting upon impulse without pausing to think."

Lancelot smiled a very little; but then he looked grave again.

"I might be led away by others, if I hadn't you to help me, Russell," he said. "But why talk so gloomily? You will be all right directly; why should I trouble my head about trying to do without you? I couldn't —I'd rather die too. Life would be no good for any-

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thing alone;" and the lad rose suddenly and took his brother's hand in his. "Don't talk any more about leaving me, Russell; I couldn't do without you, and that's all about it."

Russell bent a very loving look upon the boy's face. He let his hand close over those of his brother's, but he still spoke very gravely.

"I do not wish to leave you, Lance; I trust we may have many years to spend together. What I want is, that you should learn to stand alone—that you should not depend morally upon any one else; or rather, to put it plainest of all, that you should put your trust and confidence in One who can never fail you, never be taken away."

Lancelot was silent.

"You know what I mean, Lance?"

The boy nodded.

"Have you ever tried to get strength and help *there?*"

He hesitated and finally said in a low voice,—

"I don't think so—not really."

"Will you do so now?"

"I don't know; I'll try if you like. Russell, why do you say all this to-night?"

"Not for any reason you think. I am not at all anxious about myself; but I have often felt I ought to talk to you sometimes—to fill the place our mother bid me before she left us—only words are so very hard to find. Lance, don't forget. Learn not to trust any more in me; learn to put your faith in God."

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CHAPTER VIII.

VERA'S TROUBLES.

VERA'S troubles at home were not long in showing themselves, though at first it was only by small indications that seemed insignificant by themselves; notwithstanding they indicated pretty well how the land lay in various quarters.

For a week or two the eldest sister kept very quiet, watching closely what went on in the house, but attempting only gradually to reform what she saw amiss. She had troubles with the servants, which have no connection with the story and need not be entered upon here; and her hands were pretty full from the first in getting all into order in that department. Meantime she watched her brothers and sisters closely, studying their characters, and trying to win their confidence and affection before she was called upon to interfere with their habits or their pleasures.

She made way somewhat rapidly at first. It was a pleasant novelty having another sister in the house. Visitors began to come, which pleased Raby, who,

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being "out," was admitted to the drawing-room, and was taken by Vera more often than not when she went to return the calls paid her. Prospects of dinners and dances and parties opened out vaguely before the girl's eyes, and she had pretty new dresses ordered to fit her for an entry into society. Raby was thus vanquished easily at the outset; and whilst the novelty of the thing was fresh she was devoted to Vera, and looked upon her as a kind of fairy godmother. Indeed, she appeared somewhat in that character to all, when her wonderful boxes arrived and were found to contain delightful presents for everybody; but gradually the glamour of first impressions passed off: they grew used to the presence of the elder sister in the house; she was no longer a stranger in any sense of the word; and by-and-by came the inevitable tug of war, when the hand that held the reins began to gather them up more firmly.

At first, as long as the beautiful new sister had been something of a stranger or visitor, boys and girls alike had been—though half unconsciously—on their best behaviour; but that undefined feeling passed off in time, and was followed by a slight inevitable reaction.

One day Vera, coming in from a walk, found Madge in untidy school-girl guise, thumping away at her exercises upon the drawing-room piano, at an hour too when visitors might any moment be expected.

She did not stop when her sister came in, but

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banged away all the louder, a little angry frown upon her face. Vera came up and laid a hand gently upon the noisy, dirty fingers. Madge threw off the touch impatiently.

"Stop a moment, dear," said Vera quietly; "this is not your practising room."

"Can't help it. I'm busy. Do leave me alone!"

"But, Madge, you cannot practise here; you must go to the schoolroom piano."

"It's all out of tune, and Tiny does so drone over her lessons. Raby practises here, and so shall I."

But Vera possessed herself of the music and stood looking down with a smile at her little sister's flushed face.

"What is the matter, Madgie? Come now, you can surely tell me. What has put you out to-day?"

"Nothing. I'm not put out; but I won't be shut up for ever in that horrid old schoolroom. I will come down sometimes, and I will practise here if I choose. I always did, and I always will. You're not mamma, and you can't expect every one to do exactly as you say. Give me back my music; I can't waste my time like this."

"And you cannot practise here, dear; it is three o'clock, and any minute callers may come."

"I don't care if they do. I'm not ashamed. Besides, I shall hear if there's a knock, and I can run away."

"You must run away before that, Madge. You must finish your practising at the schoolroom piano."

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Madge's face was very black.

"It's all out of tune, I tell you."

Vera laughed a little.

"No wonder, if that is a specimen of the way you treat the poor thing. It shall be tuned to-morrow; and if it is really too bad to be used, you can leave the rest of your music till evening and play here a little, if you can do it with rather less noise, whilst we are at dinner. But the drawing-room is not the place for you to practise in, and you know it as well as I do."

Madge seized her music and dashed away.

"There's never been any peace in the house since you came, upsetting and interfering with everything," she cried as she vanished like an angry whirlwind up the stairs.

Vera sighed, but she would not let herself be discouraged. She knew that Madge was warm-hearted as well as quick-tempered, and, as she had soon an opportunity of discovering, passions were easier to deal with than sulks.

Raby, as has been said, was much edified at being introduced to society under her sister's chaperonage; and she took to her new element like a duck to the water, and being pretty and pleasant, with a few useful little accomplishments at her back, she made a successful *debut*, and rose immeasurably in her own esteem.

Life was now looked upon by her as one long,

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pleasant holiday, to be spent in going out and amusing herself with calls, shopping, or the like; whilst at home her time was whiled away in idling over a new novel or a story-book, and her most serious work was practising up an old forgotten piece of music, ready for use if wanted in company, or in learning a new song with the same object in view. As for learning anything or studying anything for its own sake, such an idea had never entered Raby's pretty, empty head. She considered her education completed, and had no desire ever to open a school-book again.

Vera watched her quietly for a while, to see if this idleness were a passing thing, caused by novelty and excitement, or whether it really had become a confirmed habit with her. As the latter conviction gradually forced itself upon her mind, she began to see that she must do something to rouse the girl from her apathy.

The sisters saw a good deal of one another; for Vera, whilst making use of the little boudoir herself, had not disturbed Raby's things, nor in any way arrogated to herself the supreme right to the use of the room. "It is big enough for us both," she had said with her sweet smile when Raby had first broached the subject to her; and they spent a great deal of time there together.

"Now, Raby," said Vera one day, coming into the boudoir about ten, after her daily round of duties was done, "I feel settled down enough at home by this

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time to want some settled occupation. What shall you and I do together?—it is always so much pleasanter 'hunting in couples,' as the boys would say. What are your favourite studies and pursuits?"

Raby opened her eyes wide, but without lifting them from the pages of her story.

"Oh, I've got a book, thanks; I don't want to do anything."

Vera came behind her and looked over her shoulder.

"'The Golden Butterfly,'" she said, reading the title. "Ah, I remember reading that once, and very much I enjoyed it."

"Yes, it's interesting," answered Raby, yawning a little nevertheless; "but I don't *enjoy* books exactly, I think."

"I don't wonder at that, Raby."

She glanced up with a sort of languid curiosity.

"Why not?"

"Because you read stories from morning till night —when you have nothing else to do, that is. They must pall at that rate. Nobody could care for them long—any more than for a perpetual diet of toffee."

Raby made an impatient little movement with her shoulders.

"I suppose I can read what I like at my age," she said rather crossly; for she had suspected Vera once or twice before of having designs upon her time.

"Only, Raby, at your age don't you think you

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should be doing something better with your time than just reading stories?"

"There's no harm in what I read," answered Raby, looking rather dogged.

"No, dear, I never said there was. We all enjoy a story sometimes, only there are other books in the world as well that we ought to know something about."

The look on the girl's face was not promising.

"I've finished my education," she said curtly.

"Poor you then!" was Vera's answer.

Raby got up looking a good deal put out.

"What do you mean, Vera, by always prying and bothering like this? I'm sure I know quite enough for all practical purposes. I know as much as there is any need to do."

"No, that indeed you do not, Raby," answered Vera, speaking more gravely than was her wont. "I hardly take you anywhere without noticing how little you can find to say on any but the most trivial topics. I don't want you to put yourself forward or to make any profession of learning, even were you able to do so; but I should like to see you able to have an intelligent comprehension of the leading questions of the day, to show a little interest in your country, in the great movements of these stirring times. I do not like the blank look that comes over your face when any talk of the kind is started, nor the uncomprehending answers you give to any comment or

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question addressed to you. It does not make me think that your education has been very highly finished."

Raby looked quite cross.

"I hate stupid talk about politics. It's so uninteresting."

"Not if you know a little about the subjects. Study history with a little intelligent interest, and you will soon change your opinion there."

"I don't care for history."

"What do you care for, Raby?"

She was silent for a moment, and then asked snappishly,—

"What does that matter to you? What have you got to do with it?"

"This much, Raby," answered Vera gravely, "that father has been talking things over with me in regard to more than one point, one of which is that of your education. You must not stop learning just because you have left the school-room, but you may choose for yourself what subjects you would best like to take up, and we will make out a course of reading that will interest us both. My education is not nearly finished yet, Raby; so we shall be able to learn a good deal together, which will be very nice."

But Raby's pretty face was clouded with a look of sullen discontent.

"Papa never interfered with us till you came."

Vera took no notice of this unpromising remark.

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"Come now, tell me, what sort of lessons would you like best? — music? drawing? modern languages? I should like some good Italian lessons myself. I have only picked up a little from reading with a translation. French and German we could read together. I have promised Madge to teach her German. I daresay you would like to learn too. Come, Raby dear, don't look at me as if I were an ogress. You can't think how much more pleasantly and happily time flies when we are busy over something better than just amusing ourselves."

"I hate being bothered. I like to do as I choose. I haven't time for all that, now that I am out."

Vera did not laugh at her, did not even show any impatience.

"Raby dear," she said very gently, "do you think that life is given to us for nothing better or higher than just to amuse ourselves—just to let things drift on in an easy, pleasant fashion, without caring for or thinking of the deeper meanings and larger duties lying below? What are our talents given to us for, dear? Have you ever thought of that?"

"I don't know what you are talking about, and I don't care. I'm not doing any harm, and I can't see why you need bother me so."

She took up her book again, and sat down with a resolutely sullen look upon her face. Vera only paused to say one word more before quitting the room.

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"Some day, Raby dear, you will not find it quite enough to say that you have done no harm with your life; you will want to be able to feel that you have done some good with it."

Raby's sulky fit lasted some days, and indeed she was always very difficult to manage when it came to the hated study hours. She was amicable enough at other times, but she was essentially idle, and to have to sit down to draw or to practise or to read, now that the habit of application had been broken through, was irksome in the extreme; and she vented her ill-temper on the elder sister, whom she regarded as the primary agent in this most unwelcome change. Her father had spoken to her on the subject, and she knew she must obey, but she did not the less resent the obligation, and she did her best at times to make Vera's life a burden to her; and Raby's sulky fits and chronic attacks of silent moodiness were far more difficult to combat than Madge's outbursts of sudden passion.

The boys too, in their own fashion, could be sufficiently troublesome. They were often uproariously noisy, not only in their own domain, where they were shut in by heavy baize doors from the rest of the house, but in the dining-room, the hall, and the staircase, which they would ruthlessly invade; and what with dashing up and down in great dirty boots, and making the whole place ring with their noise, they would become such a plague to the whole house-

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hold that some interference became absolutely necessary.

Vera was always good-tempered, but she was very firm; and though the boys generally took her reproofs in good part and submitted to her authority, yet they would indulge in a good grumble from time to time, and occasionally they would band together with their sisters and absolutely set her at defiance, until their better natures were aroused by time and reflection, and they disbanded their forces in some shame.

Many mischievous and annoying tricks did Vera find practised upon herself and her possessions, and many times her patience was sorely tried by this noisy, undisciplined crew of brothers and sisters; but she never let herself be betrayed into angry words of recrimination; she held her own with quiet, unfailing dignity and sweetness, and very slowly she began to feel that she was gaining the upper hand and winning the confidence of those about her.

It was an up-hill battle at first; but she was not afraid or dismayed. She knew that love and prayer would win the day at last, and these were the weapons with which her battle was fought.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE ICE BROKEN.

"FRED, why do you never ask that nice Mr. Graham here—the young man Bill bit so badly a month ago? Lancelot often comes home with the boys; but why do you never ask the elder brother? It must be dull work living in lodgings as they do."

It was Vera who spoke. She was arranging flowers in the drawing-room vases, and her brother had joined her on his return from his day at the hospital. It was a warm day early in May; the windows stood open, and the sunshine streamed in golden and spring-like. Vera, in a soft gray dress, long and graceful, with a deep crimson rose at her throat, was a picture in herself, Fred thought with honest admiration. He loved and admired his beautiful sister more every week of his life. He felt the change that her presence had made in the house.

He laughed a little at the question.

"Why do I never ask him? Why, I've asked and

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asked him till I'm ashamed; but it's no go. He won't come."

Vera's eyebrows went up with a sort of smiling surprise.

"Won't he? Why is that?"

"I can't make out. He's very reserved and proud and difficult to know. I like the fellow; and I've done my very best to draw him out of his shell, but I can't manage it somehow. I know he is very busy, and is always hard at work; but that does not seem quite sufficient excuse for his pointed refusals again and again. He might come in on Sundays, at least, just to tea or luncheon—that could not take up his time; but he never will. He told me once that he had always made it a rule, both with himself and his brother, to spend Sunday quietly at home."

"It was nice of him to say that," answered Vera; "some young men would have been ashamed to make such a confession. I liked Mr. Graham's face that one time when I saw him; but I thought it a very sad face too. Tiny calls him 'interesting,' and I think the mite is about right. I am sorry you cannot manage to make friends."

"So am I, but I feel about beat by this time; and as his hand is well again, I shan't have any excuse to pay a call from time to time as I used to do. He never asks me, and he always will persist in regarding my visits as 'exceedingly kind,' a waste of my 'valuable time.' Can't help thinking there must be some-

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thing odd about the fellow to make him so stand-offish."

"I can't help thinking, from what Lancelot says, that they are sadly poor," said Vera compassionately. "Perhaps that has something to do with it."

"I know they are wretchedly poor. He'd have got well of that bite long before if he'd been properly fed up at the time. That was what made it so hateful. My dog bit him, and yet I couldn't do anything to make it up to him, though I knew exactly what would have done him all the good in the world. It's an odd world, Vera, isn't it? Sometimes things go all across, and one can't see any way out of the difficulty."

"And then they all come right again without any help of ours," answered Vera brightly; "because the world is in better hands than ours."

He considered her attentively for awhile.

"Well, I wish you'd take this bit of business in hand, and 'sing the savageness' out of Graham, as Shakespeare has it. I can't quite get the fellow off my mind. He had a very bad time of it, thanks to that brute of a dog of mine, and we've never been able to make it up to him in the least since."

Vera looked up with a little smile.

"I would gladly do anything I could," she said; "but I do not see how I can get a chance of so much as seeing this impracticable young man. Tiny insists on being taken to call upon him from time to time;

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but I can hardly follow her example. If she cannot coax him here, and you cannot persuade him, I hardly see that I am likely to succeed."

"Hum, I don't know about that," answered Fred, eying his sister with critical appreciation. "The difficulty is how to get hold of the fellow."

"Yes; and until that first step is accomplished nothing can well be done."

That first step, however, was nearer of accomplishment than either of them suspected.

About ten days later, as Vera was approaching the house about five o'clock after an expedition she had taken alone upon foot, she saw nearing it from an opposite direction her brother Donald, who was walking rather slowly and leaning upon the arm of a gentleman whom Vera recognized almost at once as his favourite master, Mr. Graham. She met the pair on the door-step. Russell lifted his hat and would have decamped, but Donald held him fast.

"Don't let him go, Vera; he's been helping me home. I gave my foot a twist jumping down a dozen stairs at school. I didn't know I was so lame till I'd got half-way home, and then Mr. Graham overtook me hobbling along and gave me his arm. He must stay and have some tea now, mustn't he?"

"Most certainly," answered Vera, with her bright, sweet smile, as she led the way into the house, Donald following, still holding tight to Russell's arm on the pretence of requiring support. "Come into the

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dining-room, Don, and sit down. Have you hurt yourself really?"

"Oh no, it's nothing; just a bit of a twist.—Thanks awfully, sir," he added, as Russell helped him into a chair.—"Is tea nearly ready, Vera? I'm as thirsty as a fish."

Russell was looking at Vera in a way that indicated a renewed attempt at escape: she frustrated it by sitting down in her place before the tea-tray and pointing to a seat beside her.

"I have not seen you since the day Bill made such a savage assault upon you. I hope you are none the worse for his rough treatment. Your hand is well?"

"Quite well, thank you," answered Russell, giving in and resigning himself to his fate. "You have been very kind in sending to inquire; and your brother doctored me capitally. I am very much obliged to you all."

He spoke with less reserve and constraint than usual where the Carmichaels were concerned. Something in Vera's manner thawed him, he hardly knew how or why.

She smiled, turning to Donald,—

"Where is Fritz?"

"Oh, he went round with some other fellows by Stannard's to get some paper. He'll be in directly." And almost at once the boy made his appearance bringing Lancelot with him, as he often did—the

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house in Iddesleigh Gardens being only a few steps out of his direct way home.

Both lads stared at seeing Russell in conversation with Vera, and a look of mischievous pleasure beamed in Lancelot's eyes; but the entrance of the school-room party prevented any open expressions of surprise, and Tiny did her best to monopolize her favourite as soon as she appeared upon the scene.

Russell felt very strange in the midst of that merry family party; and yet, oddly enough, he enjoyed the new experience very much. The social five o'clock tea was a very different meal from what it had been before Vera's advent. The boys were no longer riotous, Madge and the children felt their sister's eye upon them, and they were merry and gay without indulging in that deafening clamour that once seemed the necessary accompaniment to the clatter of cups and plates.

It was very pleasant, Russell thought, to see so many bright, happy faces round him; to listen to the flow of lively talk, the cross-fire of brotherly and sisterly witticisms, and the stories they had to tell one another of the doings of the day. He was not made uncomfortable by any undue share of attention; Vera talked to him in undertones from time to time, and Tiny chattered away in great style, but was quite content to do all the talking herself. The boys appealed to him for an opinion now and then, and Madge studied his face with a sort of ingenuous

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interest; but nobody made him feel uncomfortable, and the old feeling of discomfort and dread began to pass gradually away.

After all, was it not rather morbid this persistent shrinking from people who were so ready to be friendly and kind? Might it not be really more manly and more wise to bury the past in oblivion, and act towards the Carmichaels as he would do towards any other family that had shown kindness towards his brother and himself? It was not much that was expected of him; only an occasional visit, a little reciprocal kindness, the acceptance of a trifling hospitality from time to time. Would it not be better to yield this much, to take what was offered in the spirit in which it was tendered, without always letting the ghost of a buried past stand before him barring the way? Had not his mother loved these people? Did she not always say that they had forgiven from the first; had never borne ill-will even when wronged; had wished much to befriend her and hers; and had tried hard to find them in their hiding-place? If that had been the case even then, when the injury was recent, how much more would it be so now! And if they were ready to forgive and forget, why need he shrink so much from the slight, passing friendship that was offered him by them?

They did not know who he was, true; but even had they done so, he knew it would make no difference. Then why should he hold so strenuously aloof,

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and show himself in colours that could not but make them think him ungrateful and proud and cold? Proud Russell might be, but he was keenly susceptible to kindness, keenly sensitive to impressions from without. It had been very difficult to him to reject time after time the overtures made to him by Fred Carmichael—so difficult that he had often been on the point of yielding before. Now that he had really been forced to do so, had entered the forbidden door, and was actually seated at the hospitable board—a member, so to speak, of a merry family party—when all this had happened to him, he found to his surprise that the position was, after all, not so untenable as he had fancied. It was not even disagreeable.

The ice seemed to melt from about his heart. His stern, sad face relaxed into a smile as he listened to the chatter of his little neighbour. He began to talk a little more himself, to respond more easily to Vera's comments and questions. Lancelot shot a glance now and again at his brother, and was delighted to notice the change that was slowly coming over him.

"Poor old fellow!" he said to himself; "I always said he wanted a bit of a change and some civilized society from time to time. Why, he looks more like his old self than he has done for months. I'm sure it isn't good for him to shut himself up as he tries to do."

"Come and see my garden," cried Tiny, when there was a general rise from table, and the boys went

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clattering up to their own quarters, carrying Lancelot off with them. "I've got a corner all to myself. It's got hyacinths and tulips in it now. Do come and look!"

Russell looked down and hesitated.

"I'm afraid I must be going. I have such a lot of work to do to-night."

Tiny looked very grave.

"Work! But school is over, and *you* don't have lessons to prepare. You're a master, you know, not a boy."

Vera looked at Russell with a smile.

"And masters, of course, have nothing to do out of school; do they, Tiny?—But please come round the garden first, Mr. Graham. It is good for everybody to have a rest sometimes."

He followed her without more ado.

"We are rather proud of our garden," said Vera, as they stood in the sunny enclosure shut in by high walls from the great world without. "We really do make flowers grow here, you see. They tell me we get roses in the summer. I have always grown up amongst flowers. I think I should miss them sadly now."

The soft evening light played over Vera's graceful figure as she stood beside him on the smooth-shaven lawn. He looked at her with some intentness, a wave of recollection sweeping over him. How little she had changed from the lovely, dark-eyed child who used to slip her little hand in his and wander with

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him about the little garden of his old home a few miles out of London. Her voice, her looks, her gestures, were the same. They brought back to him the vision of those bygone days: he could see the dim shrubbery-walk where they loved to wander together, smell the scent of the old-fashioned summer-roses that had bloomed along the hedge at the end. For a moment it seemed to him as if their long-lost childhood had returned, as if she must feel it as keenly as he did.

But the vision faded as quickly as it came, the dark present blotted out the bright past, and Russell awoke from his reverie with a start.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "were you asking me something?"

"Nothing of any consequence," answered Vera with a smile: she was standing opposite to him, looking up into his face with a scrutinizing expression upon her own. "Do you know, Mr. Graham, I cannot help feeling as if I had seen you before somewhere. Something in your face seems familiar—a look now and again that I seem to know. I saw it the first time we met; but I cannot recollect where we could ever have known each other before."

He smiled and shook his head, turning towards Tiny, who had run up with some flowers.

"Likenesses are odd things," he said; "one so often has that feeling about a strange face.—Did these really grow in your own garden?"

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He did not betray the least embarrassment, but he was secretly anxious to be gone. After a few meetings, no doubt, the sense of association would be lost; she would get to know his face, and would cease to trouble about the haunting likeness. He was not really afraid of being recognized; he knew he had changed too entirely to be easily identified; but the doubt made him a little uncomfortable, and he said his adieus as quickly as he could.

Vera did not detain him; she let him go, only expressing a hope that he would come in again before long when her brother was at home. Russell made a half promise to do so, and went back to his dreary lodgings; but he thought they looked brighter and more cheerful than usual. His own spirits had received a healthy impetus from this unexpected encounter with the outside world. The young man worked with more heart that night, and rose with more buoyancy of feeling next day.

The Carmichaels did not suffer that first visit of Russell's to be the last; and the ice once broken, was not allowed to form again. Fred wanted a little coaching in mathematics for an approaching examination, which Russell was glad enough to undertake. That took him to the house two evenings in the week, and a sort of intimacy sprang up between the two young men that was a source of pleasure to both. It was much better for him the change of faces and employment. He looked less worn and

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weary than of old; and although he worked harder than ever, he felt the strain less. It was something to feel that he was earning money in an unexpected way. If Fred passed his examination well, possibly his coach might obtain other pupils. Life began to look brighter again to Russell than it had done for many weary years; and perhaps the greatest relief of all was the lifting of the cloud that had overshadowed him for so long.

The past was dark enough in itself, but it had ceased to overcast the present. He no longer brooded with morbid persistency over the irretrievable error that had ruined his father and blighted his own career. He was still bearing the burden that had been imposed upon him by that one fatal act, but a good deal of the bitterness had been taken away.

How this was accomplished he could not have explained, but that it had been done by the friendly relations between himself and the Carmichaels he could not doubt. Fred had let drop hints from time to time when they had been chatting familiarly together, hints which led Russell to the conclusion that they had never suffered any serious loss or inconvenience from his father's rashness and dishonesty. He pieced together all the bits of information the outspoken son of the house let drop from time to time, and in due course he got at a pretty just estimate of what had occurred.

It seemed then as if a load were lifted from his

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heart. Others had not suffered seriously by his father's act; he himself and his mother had, in fact, been the chief sufferers, and she was now at rest. He alone was now bearing the yoke, and the very knowledge that this was so lightened it of half its weight.

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CHAPTER X.

ANTICIPATIONS.

"I SAY, Russell! Such first rate news! What do you think it is? You'll never guess!"

Lancelot burst in upon his brother one hot evening in July in a state of wild delight and exultation.

"Now set your brains to work, old boy! What do you think has happened?"

"I thought you said just now I never could guess; so what's the use of trying?"

Lancelot flung his cap into the air, and gave a whoop of delight.

"You must guess, though. Just the very jolliest thing that could possibly have happened."

Russell himself was looking unusually animated and full of spirit, despite the press of work incident to the school examinations that weighed somewhat heavily upon him.

"I'm sure I don't know what you can have heard, Lance, my boy. I've got a nice little surprise in store for you; but it seems as if you were going to take the wind out of my sails."

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Lancelot opened his eyes wide. It was not often that Russell spoke in this key, not often that he had pleasant tidings to communicate.

"What is it, old fellow?" asked Lancelot. "Let me hear your news first."

Russell took from his pocket-book a slip of folded paper, and held it up before his brother's eyes.

"What do you call that, Lance?"

"A cheque for twenty-five pounds! I say, Russell! is that what you've got for mugging away in the British Museum? I thought it was only to be twenty."

"So it was; but when I sent my work in, it was valued above the price originally named. I felt a rich man, Lance, for the first time in my life. Now, what do you think we are going to do with this windfall?"

"What?" asked the boy with sparkling eyes. "Something more interesting, I hope, than putting it by for a rainy day."

There was something comical in Lancelot's manner. Russell laughed as he threw back his head with a gesture almost of defiance, and answered with unusual animation and decision of manner,—

"Yes, my boy, something more interesting than that. It may be rash and it may be foolish, but I am going to do it all the same. How many years have we been living here, Lance, in these stuffy little rooms of ours? Three, isn't it? And the two years

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that went before were far worse. Five years you have been in London, without a change of any kind; it is bad for you and bad for me. This year at least we will mend matters. How long do you think we can make this last—travelling about in Germany with our knapsacks? Living is cheap there, and we can rough it anywhere, where things are clean and respectable. What do you say, my boy? Won't that be better than London lodgings in August?"

Lancelot's eyes sparkled and his cheek flushed.

"I say, Russell! it never rains but it pours. Do you know what my piece of news is? The Carmichaels have taken a house in Devonshire for two months—a jolly big house by the sea, where they often go in the summer. They want me to go with them, and you too, if you've no other plan on foot. Donald told me so. He said that Miss Carmichael or Mr. Fred would write about it and ask us properly; but they want us to come, and he let it out to me. Isn't it awfully jolly of them? I say, Russell, this is something like fun. It will set you up for the winter finely, and you've been working so awfully hard all the year."

"And now I'm going to have a holiday," he answered, stretching his long limbs and looking at Lancelot with a smile. "And shan't I enjoy it, too? Well, this is very kind of the Carmichaels. I hardly know what to think about it. It's incurring a great obligation, you know, if you go."

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"They don't think so," answered Lancelot quickly. "They think the burden of obligation is on their side, because you saved Tiny from being burned up, and got chawed by Bill for your pains. I know that by what Donald says. They'd be awfully glad to have us, I know." He spoke the last words so ingenuously that Russell laughed.

"You know," concluded the boy frankly, "I can't see that it matters about obligation and that sort of thing. They are very nice people, and we are friends, and that's all that I care about."

Russell smiled with a little more of gravity.

"Yours is a very simple creed, Lance, my boy; very like yourself, frank and unsophisticated. I won't argue the point with you. But what are we to say when the invitation comes? Would you rather go to Devonshire with them than to Germany with me?"

"You will go to Germany in any case? It would be more economical to stay at home and accept the Carmichaels' invitation."

But Russell smiled and shook his head.

"For once, then, I am going to be extravagant. I have set my heart on Germany, and I mean to go. I want to see our mother's grave," he added with a touch of sadness. "I do not like to think of it growing neglected and desolate alone over there. It has always been my object to visit it when I could. I shall go there, Lancelot, whatever you do. I have a strange longing sometimes to revisit old haunts."

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The boy's face had caught some of his brother's gravity, but in another moment his sunny smile beamed out again.

"I'll tell you what, Russell; I have it now. I will go to Devonshire with the Carmichaels, and you shall go and have a real good time wandering about the Black Forest, or wherever you elect to go, and getting a thorough rest and change. Your money will go just twice as far without me. I daresay you will spin it out for the best part of the holidays. Of course I should like awfully to be with you, but it would be ridiculous to halve your holiday just for that. We've plenty of friends in different places over there. I daresay you will pick up a companion now and again, much more of your own style than I could be. I never was much of a walker—I should often be a drag on you: but by yourself, or with a kindred spirit, you will be as right as a trivet, and will have no end of a good time; and so shall I with the Carmichaels. Come now, don't you think that will be the best arrangement all round? Don't you think I've spoken with a wisdom beyond my years?"

Russell smiled. Lancelot's happy gaiety was infectious that evening.

"I daresay you have, my boy. Certainly there is force in what you say. I should like to have had you with me; but I'm not sure that the sea-air and the life of a big family party would not be better for you, and more to your taste."

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"As for that," answered Lancelot eagerly, "I always like best being with you, Russell, as you know quite well. But one must look at the other side. I should hate to feel I was shortening your holiday. And I'm the sort of fellow who can be happy enough anywhere. The Carmichaels are awfully kind and nice. I know I should have capital times with them; and I know the boys want me to go because we are chums, and I play all their games, and know all about them. Only fancy, Russell, a real long holiday for us both! Oh! I can hardly believe it, it seems too first-rate to be true;" and the boy again tossed his cap into the air with another whoop of delight.

"It is something like, isn't it?" answered Russell. "Two months' holiday and change for us both! it does seem almost too good to be true. Oh yes, I'll make my money last, never fear. One can live on two or three marks a day in the outlandish places I mean to go to; and in Heidelberg and Frankfort and other places there will be people to see who will perhaps give me a bed or a dinner for old acquaintance' sake; and every little helps. Why, it seems like a dream the very thought of it. What if our fortune has turned after all, Lancelot, and the dark days are over for us!"

Lancelot had not seen his brother so animated for years. He was delighted, and could not keep quiet ten minutes together. Russell tried to fix his mind

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upon his work, but he was excited himself, and could not help breaking off every now and then to enter into calculations or to plan out routes.

"I must borrow a foreign Bradshaw. I wonder if the Carmichaels have one? How jolly it will be to be my own master again, and to hear the dear old harsh Deutsch language again! Lance, my boy, I'm half sorry, after all, that you are not coming with me."

"Don't be sorry. It's best as we've arranged; I'm sure of it. Why, Russell, the very idea of the thing has made a new man of you."

The young man laughed and pushed back his hair.

"I'm afraid I've been very bad company for you all these years, Lancelot—a very depressing kind of brother for you. One feels rather more what the pressure is when it is lightened a little. Two or three things have helped lately, and sometimes I begin to hope that better days are coming. But I'm afraid I have oppressed you very much with my anxiety and gloom. I see now that I ought to have had more faith. Things do right themselves in time, if only one can believe it."

"To be sure they do," cried the buoyant lad. "I'm so glad you think the same: if you do, it is sure to come true. As for me, how can you talk such bosh? As if you hadn't been the very best brother to me that a fellow ever had!"

Russell turned to his books with a smile.

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"I must get on," he said; "I must not anticipate my holiday like this."

The next day brought a letter from Vera Carmichael, containing the invitation anticipated by Donald; and when that had been duly answered, Lancelot's cup of happiness seemed full. His flow of spirits was endless, and he could talk of nothing but the anticipated joys to come. It was a wonder that he got through his examinations as creditably as he did, so full was his head of the prospective pleasures under constant discussion with the Carmichaels.

"It is so very kind of you to take him with you," said Russell to Vera one day. He sometimes accompanied Lancelot on his visits to the house in Iddesleigh Gardens, and he could talk to his old playmate now without the old sense of difficulty and constraint; indeed, a sort of mutual understanding and sympathy seemed to have been quickly established between them. "He has never been to the sea-side in his life. He is quite beside himself with delight at the idea. I don't think there is anything in the world he would enjoy so much. After all, there is nothing like first experiences."

"Not quite. And has Lancelot really never been to the sea before? It is high time he went, then."

"Yes, is it not? I have so wanted to take him, but I have never been able to manage it, so far."

She looked at him with a sort of quick sympathy and comprehension.

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"Ah, I understand," she said. "You were very young to have to fight the battle of life, with a young brother to support too. Lancelot tells me you were only twenty-two when you came over to England to try and make your way here."

He looked straight out before him with rather a strange smile.

"Yes, I was only twenty-two, Miss Carmichael, but I was not very young."

Her glance expressed so much of interest and unostentatious sympathy that he added, almost as if involuntarily,—

"My boyhood ended when I was twelve. I think I have never felt young since then."

"Some great trouble?" she asked gently.

"Yes."

It was seldom indeed that Russell spoke of himself. Lancelot was open enough. He told about his past life, its anxieties and privations, as frankly and simply as possible, when questioned on the subject; yet he never spoke as if he had known any great trouble. He never made the least allusion to any dark spot upon the history of the past. She thought of this as she marked the look upon Russell's face now, and she could not help saying gently,—

"At least your brother's boyhood has not been clouded or shortened."

A smile softened the somewhat bitter look upon the young man's face.

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"No; he does not know—he cannot remember. That has been spared him at least; and I have been able to live my boyhood over again in his. I sometimes wonder what would have become of me but for his bright spirits and sunny looks. He always saw light and hope even in the darkest days. He never quite let me lose heart. Without him, and the motive his dependence brought me, I sometimes wonder what would have become of me."

Her face expressed a great deal of compassion, and yet, somehow, its sweetness and sincerity took all the sting away. He could accept it from her as he could do from no one else.

"You have had a very hard battle to fight."

He smiled a little.

"Yes: life is hard for a good many of us, especially at starting. But I think the worst is over now; and I do not think I wish the past different from what it has been. I sometimes think that a man is all the better for some hard fighting."

"I think so too," she answered gravely; "if only he is not tried beyond his strength, and does not break down under the strain."

Russell's face was very thoughtful.

"There is always that chance," he said slowly. "It weighs one down sometimes—the thought of it, at least; but, after all, hard work is a great factor in life—one we could not well dispense with."

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"And then," said Vera very softly, "there is always rest at last."

His face softened strangely. He did not speak, but she knew she had been understood. A new bond seemed silently formed between them.

"And at least you are going to give yourself some relaxation now," she said, speaking in a lighter tone after an interval of silence. "We cannot persuade you to join our party and substitute Devonshire for Germany?"

"You are very kind; but I have set my heart on Germany. I lived there so many years, and sometimes a sort of longing comes over me to see the old places again. I don't know how to thank you for your kindness in wishing to include us in your party. Your best thanks will be, I think, the sight of Lancelot's enjoyment."

"Lance is a great favourite here," answered Vera with a smile. "But my little Tiny is inconsolable that you will not come too. I hope that if your tour is over before we return to town, you will join us for what time still remains. We shall not be willing to spare Lance, and I am sure you will be anxious to see each other again."

"You are very kind indeed, Miss Carmichael. It would be a great temptation if the chance arose; but I mean to make the most of my holiday, and stay away as long as I can. I have a few friends to see, with whom I have promised to stay, and I much

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doubt whether I shall be back before the school re-opens.—Are you sure that Lancelot will not be a trouble to you?" he asked suddenly. "I am sometimes struck by the fact that it is rather a cool thing to leave him on your hands like that for so long. I do hope he will not be troublesome, and give you cause to repent your kindness."

Vera laughed lightly.

"I think Lancelot is the best boy in the world. The danger will be of his being led into mischief by my riotous young brothers; but if you are willing to take that risk, I will gladly take the other."

"You are most kind," he said again. "Believe me, I am very grateful."

The glad feeling of anticipation and delight was not confined to the boys alone. Raby, Madge, and the children all caught the infection, and nothing was talked of for days but sea-side and sea-side plans. Vera entered heartily into the spirit of things. She was as pleased as any one at the thought of the change and the holiday; but all was not quite smooth sailing even yet.

A few days before the start was to be made, Madge came rushing like a whirlwind into the boudoir, her face very expressive of an angry and disturbed state of mind.

"Vera! Vera!" she cried, "what does it all mean? Here's Miss Sefton saying that she's coming with us to Coombe Sands. *Miss Sefton!* It's perfectly ridicu-

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lous. I can't think how she took the idea into her stupid old head. Just go and tell her she's in the wrong box. Miss Sefton, indeed!"

Vera looked up quietly, with the smile that Madge had learned to know well by this time.

"Well, Madgie? and why not Miss Sefton? Don't you think she needs a holiday, after this long term of teaching, as much as anybody else?"

Madge looked defiant and mutinous.

"Miss Sefton's holiday arrangements are no concern of ours. I suppose she can make her own plans, as other governesses do. I should have thought she'd want to get away from us as much as we want to be rid of her."

"Speak for yourself, dear. I don't think anybody else feels so unkindly towards poor Miss Sefton."

Madge flushed hotly with mingled anger and shame.

"Why do you call her *poor* Miss Sefton?"

"Because she is very poor—so poor that if she did not come away with us this year, she would have to stay all the time in her rooms in London, without a breath of country air or a sight of green fields and waving trees. And she was brought up in the country, and wants those things far more than we can understand."

Madge twisted her hands together; but she was not going to yield her point.

"I suppose she has a good salary. Why can't she afford to go away this year? She went last year to

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a brother living in the country; she told us so. Why doesn't she do the same now?"

"Shall I tell you why she does not? Because that brother's children have just begun with scarlet-fever; and as there is a large family, it is likely enough that others will take it, and that it may hang about for a long time. Of course Miss Sefton cannot go there, lest she should bring the infection back with her when the holidays end. But although she cannot go to nurse the children, as she would like, she has sent every penny that she could possibly afford out of her salary to help her brother, who is a poor clergyman, with the expenses of the illness; and that is why she will not be able to give herself the pleasure of a visit to the country this summer."

"Did she tell you all that?"

"I got it out of her by questions. She made no complaint; she never seemed to think she was making a sacrifice, and talked quite contentedly of remaining in town. You are a hard-hearted little woman, Madge, where some people are concerned; but I think if you had heard the tale Miss Sefton told at last to me, it would make you feel just a little sorry for some of your harsh speeches."

Madge, however, had plenty to say for herself still.

"I'm not unkind, really," she said. "I like to be kind to people as much as anybody, but I should do it in a better kind of way. Why can't you give Miss Sefton enough money to go away by herself, without

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spoiling our holidays by inflicting her on us? That is the way I should do. I hate mixing up charity and business together. Now, Vera, what do you think of my plan?"

"It would not do, Madgie. We must think of people's feelings. We cannot offer money in that blunt fashion to all classes alike. I can ask Miss Sefton to come with us to help me with the housekeeping and the children, and to undertake some light lessons on wet days, so that you do not all quite run wild this next two months. I can manage that very well; but I could not possibly make her a present in money. She would not accept it if I did."

Madge's face looked very blank.

"Lessons, Vera! lessons in holiday-time! What are you talking about? I won't do any."

"Willie and Tiny will, dear, and possibly the boys too if I ask it; and they will enjoy the holidays all the more for an occasional interlude of work. I sometimes think, Madge, that in spite of your anxiety to go to school and learn 'properly,' as you call it, you are doing your very best to grow up a wilful little dunce. You profess to despise Miss Sefton's teaching. I wish you knew half what she has tried to teach you."

Madge flushed hotly.

"I can't bear Miss Sefton," she said. "She's so stupid, so dull. May I go to school, Vera, to a day-school, as the boys do? I should so like it. I would

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be diligent and hard-working then—I would indeed."

Vera looked at her with the air of one who is studying and considering.

"I should like to do anything, or consent to any arrangement, that would add to your pleasure and give you an impetus towards learning, Madgie; but a step like that wants consideration. Suppose we make a contract. You show me these holidays and next term how much steadiness of purpose and obedience to discipline you can command; and if you satisfy me that you are really in earnest in your wish to learn, and that you really can be industrious and hard-working, I will try to arrange with father about sending you to some good school or college in the neighbourhood. Will that satisfy your aspirations?"

Madge laughed a little; her face had cleared; she looked more herself again.

"You are a knowing old Vera, trying to bind me over to keep the peace like that. Yes, I will try to be better. I don't want to be horrid and selfish, really I don't; but I *do* get so cross so often. Why is it, Vera?"

The elder sister held out her hand with a smile.

"Perhaps you forget the golden rule rather too often, Madgie—forget to do to others as you would have them do to you."

"It's so hard to think of things when one is cross, you know."

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"And why are you so often cross, my dear little sister?"

Gently as the question was asked, it brought a half-angry flush to the girl's face.

"I used not to be cross half so often—before you came, Vera."

"That means that you were not cross when you could have everything just your own way."

Madge did not want to smile, but the corners of her lips worked involuntarily.

"I suppose so," she answered honestly.

Vera made no comment, and presently the younger sister spoke with a certain amount of vehemence.

"I can't help wanting my own way; everybody does. I don't want to be cross, but I can't help it."

"Do you try to help it?"

"Sometimes; but what's the good? If one is cross, one is; it's no good pretending one is not."

Vera could not help smiling.

"I don't know about that: fighting down the cross feeling and ignoring it is one of the very best ways of getting rid of it. I often think, Madgie, that you would make a very good little fighting soldier, if only you could get hold of the right weapons, and fight under the right banner."

Madge's face was suddenly grave; a new idea seemed thus presented to her.

"What do you mean, Vera? What weapons? what banner? what battle?"

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"The battle, little sister, that we all have to fight, all our lives long, is with sin and evil, first in our own hearts, and then in the world around us. The banner we serve under is Christ's, whose soldiers and servants we are. The weapons are those that He will give us if we ask—the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit. Would you not like to be a soldier under such a General as that?"

Madge hung her head. She had never heard Vera speak so seriously before. She did not know how to answer, and yet she did not feel at all vexed. She wished she knew more about that army and that General; but she had seldom given a serious thought to such subjects since her mother died.

"I will try to be good," she said hurriedly and confusedly, and ran away before another word could be spoken.

Vera looked lovingly after her, glad that the ice had been broken at last, and that she had been able to say those few words to her headstrong, hot-tempered young sister. She was aroused by a gentle touch on her hand, and saw that Tiny had crept up to her, and was looking up into her face with trusting blue eyes.

"I want to be good," she said very earnestly. "May I be a soldier too?"

"Yes, darling, indeed you may; children often make the very best little soldiers."

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"I should like to be one," said the child again. "I want to be kind and good like you, Vera. I heard what you said about poor Miss Sefton. I will always be kind to her now; and I will never call her uninteresting again."

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CHAPTER XI.

DEPARTURE.

NOW, Lance, my boy, you will be very careful, won't you, not to get into mischief or to give anybody any needless trouble? Don't let your spirits run away with you, and don't let me have to hear that you gave them cause to repent their kindness."

Lancelot laughed gaily.

"All right, old Mentor. I'll be as steady as old Time himself. Come now, I'm not such a bad boy that you need look so lugubrious on my account. I think I'm a very fair specimen of virtue, all things considered;" and the ingenuous way in which he said this made Russell laugh.

"So you are, old chap, a very good boy in the main; only don't let your spirits run away with you. A holiday like this is something new for you."

Russell and Lancelot were standing together in their room, which showed traces of packing up and projected departure. The walls were bare of pictures; all their little treasured possessions had been

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safely put away in the cupboards. Lancelot's luggage had already been despatched to the house in Iddesleigh Gardens, whither he was about to repair immediately himself; and Russell, with his knapsack on his shoulders and his small valise in his hand, was just on the point of starting to catch the night-boat to Antwerp.

"It seems so odd to have to say good-bye to you, Russell," said the boy. "I don't half like it when it comes to the point. I wish you'd been coming with us instead. Good-bye, old chap. Mind you take care of yourself. You're not made of cast iron, you know, so don't go and overdo things."

"Not I," answered Russell smiling. "I shan't be in any danger of that. I shall hardly open a book all the time I am away."

"A very good thing, too. Well, I suppose we must be going. Can't I come down to the docks and see you off?"

"No, no; it's far more trouble than it's worth, and it will soon be dark. You go to your friends, and I will make my way eastward. Good-bye, old boy. God bless you. Take care of yourself, and don't forget the warnings your croaking old brother has sometimes given you. My kind regards to Miss Carmichael and her father. Good-bye, dear old chap, good-bye."

He pressed the boy's hand lovingly, and Lancelot returned the pressure with a quick, convulsive clasp. He felt more in parting with Russell than he had

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anticipated, and for a moment all the colour and brightness faded from his face; but he recovered himself as he walked along the familiar streets towards the Carmichaels' house, and by the time he reached the door-step all his smiling gaiety had come back.

The house was in that state of joyous, tumultuous bustle that precedes the exodus of a large family party and household. Boxes stood in the hall, servants hurried to and fro. Almost every room showed traces of greater or less confusion; and the boys scampered about everywhere, laughing and shouting and getting in everybody's way, as they raced about in wild exuberance of spirit.

The party was to start next morning by the ten o'clock train, so that all preparations had to be made over night. Several servants were to accompany the family; and altogether the bustle of departure was something considerable.

Lancelot was welcomed with vociferous greeting, and dragged from spot to spot, whilst everybody talked at once, explaining the whys and the wherefores of various arrangements, and the contents of the delightful baize bags that held the boys' most precious treasures.

"Vera has been so jolly. She's given us all sorts of first-rate things—fishing-rods and stilts and tennis bats; and just the same for you, Lance, as for Fritz and me. She's got lots of tin, Vera has—came in for

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a fortune or something of that kind. She's no end of a jolly sister to have. Shan't we have fine times just!"

Vera had her hands pretty full that day, but she found time to welcome Lancelot very kindly, and hope that he would manage to be happy with them without his brother.

"Oh yes," answered the boy eagerly. "I shall miss him, of course, but I'm so awfully glad to think he is getting a real, proper holiday, that I shan't mind about anything else; besides, I shall be with you, which is so first-rate. And you are so awfully good to me, Miss Carmichael. I don't know how to thank you."

"Then don't try," answered Vera with a little smile; "and run off all of you now, for I am much too busy to be troubled with a pack of good-for-nothing boys."

"Isn't she jolly?" cried Fritz as they scampered off again. "You may call her Vera if you like, Lance; you seem to kind of belong to us now, you know."

"She would think I was kind of a cheeky sort of fellow if I did," laughed Lance; "but she is awfully good to me all the same."

The boys were too much excited to sleep very soundly that night, and they were up and about long before their usual time next day. It seemed a huge time before they were actually off, so great

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was their impatience; but at length they were all gliding smoothly along through the sunny country in a comfortable saloon carriage reserved for their own use.

Lancelot had never travelled so luxuriously in his life before. It was rather like a dream to him this sudden change of fortune. And the thought that Russell was enjoying himself elsewhere in his own fashion was a cause of unmixed satisfaction. The boy had not a care upon his mind. He was entirely and unreservedly happy.

He was amused to find Miss Sefton of the party, but was very polite to her in his boyish fashion. She had been kind to Russell during the time his hand had been so troublesome, had made him poultices, and had seemed anxious to be of use in any way she could think of. Russell often spent an hour with her, "coaching" her, as Lance expressed it, in the mysteries of classics and mathematics; but the boy never breathed a word of this to his friends. His instincts warned him that it would not be kind to the patient, plodding governess, to let it be known that she had still to study, to keep ahead of her boy-pupil.

The other boys took their cue from Lancelot, and paid little attentions to Miss Sefton. They, too, had been surprised and rather vexed by her addition to the party; but Madge had put a good face on things, and had declared it was "all right;" which verdict had been accepted without further ado.

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How eagerly Lancelot awaited the moment when they should reach their journey's end, how excitedly he scanned the horizon as they scudded along for a sight of the sea, none knew but himself. Save during the night-crossing, when he had come over five years ago from Belgium with Russell, and had been sick the whole time, he had never seen the sea, and of the delights of a sojourn in its neighbourhood he knew nothing save by hearsay. But his imagination, together with the stories told by his companions, had painted the future in the most vivid colours, and he was able to settle to nothing and to do nothing save gaze eagerly out at the flying landscape and count the hours until they should arrive at their journey's end.

And what an arrival it was!

The house they were bound for stood by itself in a large, beautiful garden blazing with flowers. It was delightfully situated at the edge of a little pine wood, with the sea straight in front not five hundred yards away. A little river ran through the grounds, widening out as it joined the sea; and beside the stream were both a boat-house and a bathing-house, entirely at the disposal of the new-comers: and at almost all states of the tide, in rough weather or in smooth, the boats could be launched from the house and rowed out to sea with the greatest ease. Only at very low water did they have to get out to push the craft over the sand-bar at the mouth of the stream.

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The house itself was comfortable and commodious; but the boys thought little of that. The garden, the river, the boats, and the sea were their delight, and they had no time nor thought to spare for anything else. Madge was as wildly excited as her brothers, and rushed about with them helter-skelter everywhere; and Vera's pleasure, though very differently expressed, was as great as their own.

Mr. Carmichael had not come down with his family. He had several visits to pay and matters of importance to attend to. He purposed joining them later, but did not expect to be there for very long together. The charge of the party thus devolved upon Vera and Fred.

"I hope the boys will not be reckless," she said to her brother as she watched them putting out to sea next morning in one of the boats. "The coast is pretty safe, is it not?"

"Yes, for the most part, at any rate at this time of year; and the boys are well used to boats, and have been here before. If a spell of rough weather come we must keep an eye on their doings; but in August that doesn't often happen."

Lancelot took to the water like a duck. He was never tired of the boating, the bathing, the shrimping at low tide, and the stilt races along the smooth sands. He grew as brown as a berry, and looked a different being from the rather delicate-faced boy of a few weeks back. His enjoyment was pleasant to

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see, it was so perfect and entire; and for him everything had the charm of novelty.

Vera grew fond of him. He interested her she hardly knew why. She often experienced the feeling which had come over her on first seeing him—the impression that she had seen him before, that there was something familiar in the bright, boyish, sunbrowned face. She could not catch the fleeting resemblance, but it haunted her increasingly as the boy grew more familiar with her, and chatted to her with a freedom and ease that had not been possible in the earlier stages of their acquaintance.

Sometimes when he appeared dressed in white flannels of Donald's, which showed off his graceful figure and heightened the brilliant beauty of his face, this impression grew stronger than ever. Once she asked her brother if he had ever felt the same thing.

Fred shook his head.

"No; he doesn't remind me of any one," he answered. "Perhaps it's some one you've seen in Tasmania."

"Very likely," answered Vera, still watching the boy who was playing tennis with her brothers and Madge; "but I'm convinced I have seen either him or some one very like him before."

"It's odd, too, rather," remarked Fred; "for the governor said just the same one day when he met Lance in the hall—said he had a look that seemed

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familiar. He's always seemed to take a sort of interest in him since."

"I wish I could remember," said Vera. "I should say, at a guess, it was somebody I had known long ago, in my childhood. The memory has a sort of flavour of childhood about it, if you know what I mean."

"I know," answered Fred nodding. "Talking of childhood's friends reminds one of Arthur Gordon. You're no nearer finding him, I suppose?"

Vera started a little, she hardly knew why.

"No," she answered. "I had hoped father would be able to help me a little, but he can't; and no answers ever come to advertisements. It is a great responsibility a trust like that; but I must do my best about it. I hope, perhaps, when I go about visiting our various relations in the autumn and winter, as I have promised to do, that I may get at a clue of some sort. So many of them knew Mrs. Gordon, and perhaps some one will know her maiden name. I may be able to get hold of her relatives and find out something from them. That, at least, is what I hope."

"Aunt Mary did not know her maiden name?"

"No; she never spoke of her family. They were angry at her marriage, and cast her off entirely. It was a painful subject, of course, and one she avoided. She was known to have been of a very good family, but I cannot find out what her name was. Father

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does not know either. I suppose eventually I may have to advertise for their marriage register, but I shall wait before doing that. I dislike advertising, somehow."

"Yes; and as likely as not the whole family has died off. She was delicate; and the boy was nothing to boast of, if I remember right—a thin chap, wasn't he, with a bright colour and rather a delicate chest. It's quite as likely as not that there is no such person living now. However, of course you must do your best."

Fred went off to join in the game. Lance had given up his bat, heated by his exertions, and was glad to come over to Vera and sit down in the shade.

"Whew! it is hot," he said.

Somehow the words just spoken by Fred, "A thin chap with a bright colour," recurred with sudden vividness to her mind. She looked at Lancelot. Of whom did he remind her? Could it be Arthur Gordon? She could not be certain, she could trace no likeness to the half-forgotten boy's face; and yet the idea once suggested would not quite be banished. At least a question could do no harm.

"Lancelot," she said, "have you any relatives of the name of Gordon?"

The boy shook his head.

"Not that I know of. I don't think we have any relations at all."

"Isn't that almost impossible?"

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"Oh no, not with fellows like us who have knocked about the world and forgotten people. Lots of chaps don't know anything about their relations. I don't believe we've got any."

"And you don't know the name of Gordon?"

"No, not at all. I fancy I should know if we had any relations of that name, or of any other. Why do you ask?"

"I fancied you were rather like a boy I once knew called Arthur Gordon; but I'm not sure if it was he after all."

Lancelot laughed a little.

"Fellows often tell me I'm like somebody. I think I must have rather an ordinary kind of face," he answered carelessly.

She was glad he paid so little heed to her words. She had made the inquiry, and it had been made in vain. She was glad that it should be forgotten.

Other things came and put the matter from her mind.

Mrs. Wells, the mother of Fred's hospital friend, had a house at Coombe Sands, where she spent most of her time, and she lost no time in calling upon Miss Carmichael. She had several very nice daughters, with whom Raby struck up a great friendship; and when her son came down from London to complete the party, the two families saw a great deal of one another, and became very friendly together.

Vera was very glad it was so, for Madge was

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rather too much inclined to emulate her brothers—more so, in fact, than was altogether desirable; and the counter-attraction of a family of nice girls was a great advantage to her as well as to Raby.

It was with a sort of amusement mingled with her satisfaction that the elder sister by-and-by listened to the following confession:—

"Vera, dear, I want to tell you something."

"Well, Raby."

"I want to ask you something."

"Well, dear."

"I want to tell you that I see now that you were quite right in what you said about me, and how idle I was, and how little I did; and I want to know if you'll let us go on with our reading now, whenever we have time; and if you'll tell me whenever I say a stupid thing, and teach me how to do better."

Vera looked up with a smile of inquiry.

"I will with pleasure help you all I can; but why this sudden thirst for information?"

"Because I feel how ignorant I am. I didn't believe it before, but I see it fast enough now. You don't know how ashamed I sometimes feel when Ethel and Dolly Wells are talking of their studies and their books, or when things drop out quite casually to show how much they have read and how they have enjoyed it. Then you know how they all talk together; how interested they are about such lots of

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things; how they make their brother tell them what is happening, and get him to explain whatever they don't understand. If it hadn't been for what you've taught me these last three months, I should have been so awfully ashamed so very often when he asked me my opinion. I can say something now, but a few months ago I hadn't an idea about anything—I shouldn't have known what he meant; and what would he have thought of me? I think it is so stupid to be content to grow up knowing nothing and caring about nothing. You may teach me now, Vera, as much as ever you like. I will never be sulky any more. I will never say I don't want to know; for I do, I do indeed."

She had spoken rapidly, with a vehemence not usual with her. Vera stood up and looked at her with a smile.

"That is right, Raby. I am very pleased to hear you say it; but tell me, is this a love of learning for its own sake, or a wish to stand well in the eyes of people such as Mr. Wells and his clever sisters?"

A wave of colour swept over Raby's face. She answered very humbly,—

"Indeed, Vera, I do want to be different. I am nineteen now, and I made ever so many good resolutions on my birthday. I did indeed, long before I ever saw any of these people. I want to be like you, Vera; everybody loves you—even if they don't want to they can't help it. I should like to be like that."

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Vera half shook her head, and said something about "little flatterer;" but Raby interrupted,—

"It isn't flattery; I do feel like that really. I often wonder what it is in you that makes you different from other people. I think it must be because you always think of yourself last."

Vera was smiling in a very bright way.

"Well, Raby dear, that is a very safe rule to follow. If you want to win love of the right sort, there is nothing like it; and we will do what we can to make a scholar of you besides. I am sure Miss Sefton would be delighted to read with you regularly. She would enjoy her holiday all the more for feeling that she was useful to some of us."

"Poor Miss Sefton! I did not treat her very well when I was in the schoolroom," said Raby with compunction. "I did not set a good example to the others, I am afraid; but I will try to make up for it now."

"Do so, dear," answered Vera warmly. "Luckily, it is never too late to mend."

Raby certainly seemed to have turned over a new leaf, to have grown more gentle, more thoughtful, more womanly. She had always been pretty and graceful and sweet-spoken (unless put out), but there was undoubtedly an added depth about her that gave to her a double charm. Vera often studied her with loving scrutiny as weeks went quickly by, and this subtile change seemed more than ever appa-

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rent; but it was some words of Fred's that put the clue into her hands.

"Doesn't it strike you, Vera, that Wells and Raby are a good deal mutually smitten?"

Vera gave a sudden start. She had not chanced to see those two in company very often; perhaps because they had a way of wandering off together; perhaps because Mrs. Wells, who had taken a great liking for this eldest sister, kept her pretty well engrossed during her visits.

"Is it so, Fred?"

"Looks like it to me. I'm sure Wells makes no secret of his attentions; and Raby takes them very willingly, I think."

"Dear little Raby; I have thought her changed of late. So that is it, is it?"

"Wells is a very nice fellow," said Fred, "the kind of fellow one isn't afraid of introducing to one's sisters. I always liked him. He's a long way better than the run of fellows one gets to know in hospital. His people are awfully nice, too. If I were a marrying man I don't know but what I should take a fancy to one of those girls myself. Tell you what, if it is as I think, Raby will be a lucky sort of girl. He has some money, plenty of brains, and is an awfully nice kind of fellow."

Vera was musing deeply.

"Nice in the right kind of way, Fred?" she asked at length softly.

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He looked at her a moment, and then made a sign as of assent.

"I know what you mean," he answered; "and I think it is so."

"Then I am very glad."

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CHAPTER XII.

IN PERIL.

"NOW for a jolly day on the water!" shouted Fritz, tearing down to the boat-house with Lance at his heels. "I do like days when all the grown-ups go out and leave us to our own devices. It's just a jolly day for the water—rather rough and not too hot. I want to get round that big headland over there. We've never done that yet, and the wind is just right."

"Oh, jolly!" cried Lance, rubbing his hands. "Where's Donald? Where's Madge? Aren't they coming too?"

"To be sure. Madge is foraging in the kitchen. She's a prime favourite with cook, and will get us a jolly dinner. Don was just seeing the carriage people off. How glad I am we didn't go! I do think picnics are such stupid things. Now help me out with the boat; we'll have the big one to-day, as there's some sea on.—Ah, here comes Madge, staggering under her burden. — Bravo, Madge! hold hard!

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We'll lend a hand with the provender. I say, Madge, what do you say to getting round the headland at last?"

Madge, relieved of her burden, cut a caper indicative of delight.

"Oh, how jolly! Can we really do it?"

"Of course we can. We've the whole day before us. We'd have got before, only it's been so awfully hot. To-day everything's just right, and a jolly breeze blowing off land just right for us. We shall skim along like birds."

"And how about getting back?" asked Lance; "won't it be rather a grind?"

"Perhaps; but who cares for that? Besides, the breeze always drops towards afternoon," answered the sanguine Fritz. "Oh, we'll get back, never fear. We can't lose a chance like this."

"'Such an opportunity may not occur again,'" sang Madge, capering about with delight. "Come along, don't let's lose time. Where's Don?"

"He'll be here directly. Here he comes.—Look sharp, Don! We want to be off."

Donald came running down at full speed. His eyes sparkled as he caught sight of the luncheon-basket.

"We're going out on the spree then, are we?" he asked. "Where?"

Fritz pointed to the distant headland standing out with great distinctness in the rather ominously clear sunlight.

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"We're going round there, my boy."

Donald looked eagerly in the direction indicated, and then his face fell.

"Oh, but I say we can't," he said suddenly.

"Can't!"

"Well, I mean we mustn't."

"What do you mean?"

"That's just what I want to tell you. They called me before they drove off, and said we weren't to go out of the bay. Fred thinks there is a storm brewing, and Vera and he both said we must keep in the bay. What a bore, though; such a jolly day for going."

Fritz looked very mutinous. He glanced at Madge, and saw his feelings reflected in her face.

"Look here," he said; "that's all bosh. What does Fred know about the weather? He's no such great prophet. Storm, indeed! Just look at the sunshine—look at the sky! I never heard such bosh in my life. Why ever did you knock under to them, Donald? Why didn't you say it was all bosh, and that we should do as we liked?"

"Well, I didn't know what you had planned to do," answered Donald, looking longingly out over the foam-flecked water. "You hadn't spoken about getting round the headland, so I didn't mind so much then. I thought we should just paddle about the bay, and bathe and lunch in our cove. I'd have said more if I'd known about this."

"Well," cried Fritz, "I don't see the fun of spoiling

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our whole day just because Fred and Vera said a few croaking words to Donald. If we'd all been there to argue the point, we should have got our own way directly. It was only because Don didn't know, that he gave in so meekly. *I* don't feel bound by it one bit."

"Nor I!" cried Madge quickly. "I think Vera and Fred try to lord it over us a great deal too much. I don't see the fun of being always under the thumb of one's brother and sister. I vote we go all the same."

"To be sure!" cried Fritz more and more vehemently, encouraged by Madge's support and Donald's visible hesitation. "We should be a precious pack of ninnies to be stopped by a few words like that;—eh, Lance?"

All eyes were bent somewhat eagerly upon Lancelot.

Fritz and Madge both felt that if he gave his vote in favour of obedience Donald would stand firm, and the delightful expedition must of necessity be abandoned; but if he would only join with them and make three against one, good-natured Donald would be pretty sure to yield and throw his scruples to the winds. Lance had no special sense of responsibility, but the others felt for a moment as if the casting vote lay in his hands.

Madge seized the moment and sprang up to Lance, taking him coaxingly by the arm.

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"You'll come, I know," she cried, her eyes dancing with eagerness. "You want to go as much as any one. You've more sense than to be stopped by such a silly little thing as that. Do come, Lance; we shall have such fun!"

"If only your sister would not mind," he said, hesitating.

"She won't mind because she won't know, you silly boy; and we shall be home long before she is, because they are going to have dinner or tea or something at the Wells's; and Miss Sefton will bring the little ones home. We'll tell her all about it when she gets back. She won't mind, really. It would be too silly to be stopped by what she said to Donald. If she'd known we wanted so much to go, she would have been sure to say yes. She always likes us to enjoy ourselves."

"Why, yes, so she does," answered Lance, looking longingly out to sea. "But the weather—do you think a storm is coming?"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Fritz with eager confidence. "Just look at the sun how it shines! Storm, indeed! What does Fred know about the weather, I should like to know? Come on, Lance, do!"

"Oh do!" pleaded Madge, her bright eyes eloquent with persuasion. "Do come, Lance. It will be so delightful—a whole day on the water! and we are losing such a lot of time waiting about like this."

Lance threw his scruples to the winds. He was

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fond of Madge, who was always very kind to him ; it was more difficult to resist her than Fritz.

"Come along then," he cried ; "I'm sure I want to go as much as any one."

He sprang after Fritz into the boat, and gave his hand to Madge. Donald hesitated a moment, looked at the sea and the sky, and finally made a compromise.

"Well, we can go out for a bit, and see what the weather looks like then. If it seems likely to turn rough, we need not leave the bay. But there's no reason why we should not go out. We're not bound to go round the headland if we don't think it safe."

"To be sure not! Come along, old fellow! That's right. No harm in going out. We can turn back as soon as ever we like if the weather looks fishy. I don't believe in this storm, however. But we can wait and see."

So said Fritz as he busied himself in rigging up the mast and setting the little sail. They were all in the boat now, gliding down the stream towards the sea in the highest possible spirits. Donald cherished a hope that they would manage to get their day's pleasure without directly disobeying Vera ; the others forgot everything but the delights of sailing over a sunny sea with a favouring breeze.

How they scudded along in their little light craft! how the waves laughed and sparkled! how quickly they got out to sea! They could hardly believe their eyes as the land receded further and further away.

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The rapid motion was delightful—intoxicating; and so easily did they fly over the green, foam-crested waves, that they had no idea how large and strong they were, nor how strong was the wind that was carrying them along before it.

"I say, this is what I call jolly!" cried Fritz. "Storm, indeed! Why, it's just a perfect day. We couldn't have chosen a better. We shall be round the headland in no time, and back again by dinner-time if we choose."

"Oh, but we won't choose that!" cried Madge. "I want to go on and on ever so far. This is just perfect. Isn't it, Lance? Aren't you glad we came?"

"Oh yes, it is first-rate. I never knew it so jolly before. I wish your sister were with us."

"Vera doesn't care about being on the sea," laughed Madge; "it makes her head ache. But I call it lovely. I do love racing along over the big green waves. Aren't they splendid to-day?—just as clear as crystal."

"Are you going out of the bay?" asked Donald, who, despite his enjoyment, could not quite forget the injunction he had received.

Fritz laughed and pointed back at the shore.

"My dear boy, we're well out of the bay already, as you can see for yourself; and the sea's not a bit rougher for it. Oh yes, we'll be round the headland in no time now; and then, if there's nothing very attractive, we can turn if it pleases you. But who

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would be silly enough to think of danger on a day like this? Why, the weather is simply perfection."

"Why, so it is," answered Donald. "I don't suppose Vera would mind, really."

So on and on flew the little white-sailed boat before the freshening breeze, and the excitement and delight of the rapid motion banished from all minds any doubts or scruples. The merry crew laughed and sang, joked and chattered, scudding on at a rate that was simply glorious, and not only one but many headlands were passed before they began to think of the inevitable return journey.

They lunched with appetite out of the generously-packed basket, and laughed to think how much more enjoyable their own picnic was than the one they had that day avoided; and only after some considerable time had fled did Donald awake to a sort of anxiety about their distance from home.

"I say, we've come out a tremendous way," he said; "and we're a long way from land too. Don't you think we'd better be turning back? We shan't find it quite so easy going the other way."

"Oh, I don't know," answered the sanguine Fritz; "we can tack about and take our time. If there's any difficulty, we can get under shelter of the cliffs and row. No trouble about getting home. Well, we'll put her about, if you like.—Port your helm, Lance!"

Lance obeyed. The next moment Madge gave a

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little frightened scream. The boat had almost capsized.

Donald instantly loosed the sail, which flapped wildly in the wind, but the boat righted itself at once.

"Turn her round first, and hoist sail afterwards," cried Fritz. "Out with the oars, you fellows!"

Donald looked about him and then glanced at his brother.

"You haven't put in the oars, only the old pair of sculls."

"What's the odds? Sculls will do just as well.—You keep the tiller, Lance; Don and I will row. Now, get her head round. Steady, though. Look sharp! We mustn't keep broadside to these waves long. I'd no idea they were so big!"

Indeed the whole four were aghast at their position when once they had got the boat round, and were trying to make headway against the wind instead of flying before it. The smooth green walls seemed to rise mountains high above them. They did not know how to keep the bow end on to the heavy seas. Often they rolled helplessly in the seething trough, in imminent danger of being swamped. The rising wind whistled shrilly in their ears. They no longer laughed and joked at the idea of a storm.

Madge's face was very pale. She had nothing to do but sit still and watch. Every moment it seemed to her as if their helpless little craft must founder.

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She clasped her hands closely together, and tried to be brave; but oh, it was a very dreadful, a very terrible thought, that perhaps they should never get safe home again. She tried to pray, but the words seemed to stick in her throat. Her disobedience of an hour or two before seemed to rise up and stand between her and Him to whom she wished to pray. She had known all the time that she ought to have obeyed Vera: she had determined to please herself, and this was the end of it. That thought paralyzed her mind. She could not pray.

"I tell you what it is," said Lance presently. "I can't steer much longer. You don't know what work it is keeping the bow to these huge waves. My arms are quite numb already. I shall let the tiller slip before long, I am afraid; it's such tremendously hard work."

His face was pale and strained. It was evidently quite true that the exertion was beyond his strength. Donald looked at him and looked towards the shore.

"It's not the least good trying to get back. We don't make a bit of headway, and we may be swamped any minute, as it seems to me. The only thing is to turn round again and run before the wind, as we did before. Perhaps we can run into some cove or inlet along the coast, or perhaps some fishing-boat will pick us up and take us along. But it isn't the least good our trying to row to land. We can't do it."

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"Don't believe we can," answered Fritz panting. "Let's get her head round sharp then!"

They shipped a little water turning, but there was a sense of release the moment the boat's head was turned the other way. Fritz cautiously hoisted a little sail, and they began again to skim lightly and easily over the rising waves. For a moment the freedom from imminent peril brought to each heart a glad rebound of joyful relief; but as they looked about them and considered their position, they found it sufficiently critical.

A dark bank of clouds was drifting over the sunny sky. The warmth of the sun was abating, and the cold wind swept fiercely over the crested waves and drove the little boat helplessly before them. The gale was blowing off shore, so that it was impossible for the boys to attempt to gain the land. They were too inexperienced in the art of sailing to do much more than just drift before the wind; and thus they found themselves being carried further and further out to sea in a little frail boat, with a storm coming rapidly up and the best of the day gone. For it was now September, and the light was waning perceptibly. It was but half-past three in the afternoon, but the heavy masses of cloud spreading over the sky obscured the brightness of the day, and seemed to tell of rapidly approaching darkness.

Very silent were all the company in that little boat. Madge's face was still very pale, and Donald

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came and sat beside her, putting his arm about her in caressing fashion. He was the eldest of the party; he felt himself responsible in a manner for the safety of all; and oh, how bitterly he was blaming himself for his disobedience of a few hours ago! Vera had told him not to leave the bay. It was to him the order had been given. She had trusted him. He had said "Yes" to her command, and she had never doubted for a moment that he would keep his word. But he had broken it—he had pleased himself instead of standing firm—and this was the result.

"Madge," he said softly, "poor little Madge! I wish I had not led you into this. If you could only get safe to shore, I'd not mind much what happened."

She nestled up close to him, comforted a little by the pressure of his arm.

"You didn't lead us into it," she whispered. "You tried to stop us. It was my fault and Fritz's. You and Lance didn't want to disobey."

"I think that makes it worse," answered Donald. "You didn't think it mattered; but I did, and yet I came."

"Oh, never mind whose fault it is," said Madge with a little sob. "Here we are, right in the middle of the sea, and the storm is coming. Don, do you think we shall—be drowned?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"It is so dreadful."

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He held her more closely but said nothing. What could he say?

"Madge," he said after a long silence, bending down so as to speak into her ear alone, "God can take care of us, you know."

"I suppose He can," she answered; "but I don't know if He will. We have been so naughty, so disobedient."

"Let us ask Him," said Donald very softly.

"I can't. I've tried, but it doesn't seem any good. Oh, I wish we had obeyed Vera. If I had not been so naughty I think I could pray now; but it doesn't seem any good when there's that."

Donald said nothing. His words would not come readily, but deep down in his heart he had a feeling that even sin need not keep us from God if it were sin truly repented of. He bent his head over Madge, and he prayed, in a simple, boyish fashion, that his little sister's life at least might be saved, and theirs too, if it was God's will. He felt braver and happier then, but he did not talk any more.

Fritz had the tiller. He was too much engrossed in his duties as steersman to have thought to spare for aught besides. But Lance sat beside him, his head on his hand, wrapped in painful thought. He was thinking of Russell, his dearly-loved brother, who had been like a father to him from his childhood upward. What would Russell do without him, all alone in the wide world? What would he think when he heard

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that it was through participating in an act of disobedience that his brother had met his death?

How clearly Lancelot remembered now the warnings he had heard from Russell's lips! How it all came back to him, those grave words he had listened to so lightly, begging him not to let himself be led into wrong-doing for want of a little firmness of purpose, pointing out the tendency to weakness in his character, and urging him above all things to watch and to pray.

How had these warnings been received? With a sort of incredulous amusement; a feeling that the elder brother was quite right to indulge in an occasional lecture, but that he was in no such great danger after all. Had he watched and prayed? Had he striven might and main against temptation? Lancelot knew quite well that he had not. He had drifted along in easy, pleasant fashion, enjoying to the full the good things that had fallen of late to his lot. He had had no consciousness of anything wrong with himself; things had gone too smoothly for that. He knew that he was liked by the Carmichaels, that he was a rather special favourite with Vera and her father. Was it likely he would trouble himself very much over the latent faults in his character when there was so little to remind him of them?

But they came back to him now with a strange new face. He saw them as he had never seen them before. He was weak, he was yielding, he was almost cowardly. He would rather do anything than

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withstand people he was fond of. Almost any word in the English language was easier to him than that little word "no." He saw it plainly now—his weakness in giving way to Madge's pleading—his tacit disobedience in joining with those who were bent upon setting Vera's wishes at defiance. He knew quite well that if he would have joined with Donald they could have induced the other two to give up the projected voyage, but he had elected the easier and pleasanter course, and this was the result.

"If ever we get safe out of this," said Lancelot to himself, "I will never, never be so foolish again. I will never forget any more what Russell has told me."

Yet Lancelot did not bow his head in prayer as Donald had done, as Madge was trying to do. He was excited, anxious, restless—full of sorrow for the past and good resolutions for the future, should a future be granted to him; but for the moment he could not compose his mind or lift his heart in prayer. His naturally buoyant spirits did not desert him even now. His inexperience rather lessened than magnified the perils of their position: he could not realize that their boat might sink in the waves, even though he knew that such might be the case. He felt as if something *must* happen to save them. He could not believe that they would die.

"Madge," whispered Donald, after a long, long silence, "are you cold or hungry? Can I do anything for you?"

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She shook her head.

"Only hold me tight, Don, dear Don. I like to feel your arm round me. Is the storm getting worse yet?"

"I don't think so, but I don't suppose it will go down yet. It will blow hard for hours, I'm afraid. And it's beginning to rain."

A gust of wind brought a driving shower with it. Donald wrapped Madge closely up in the one rug they had brought with them, and sat so as to shelter her from the worst of the storm.

"How dark it gets, Don!" she said, pressing closer and closer to him; then, very low, she put the question, "Are you afraid, Don?"

"I don't know," he answered gravely. "I feel better than I did at first."

"Why? We're farther from land than ever. I can hardly see it."

"I know; we're ever so far from land; but—but somehow I think God seems nearer."

Madge took Donald's hand and held it tight.

"I wish I felt that too."

"You would, Madge, if you would pray to Him."

She felt the tears rising to her eyes; she spoke with little strangled sobs.

"I'll try—I'll try."

"Yes, try, Madgie dear. It isn't hard, really—it isn't indeed."

A silence, a few sobs, and Madge spoke again:—

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"I'm so sorry I was naughty, I'm so sorry for being naughty so often; not because I think we shall be drowned, but because—because it was so wrong. I knew better, but I wouldn't care—I would do as I liked. Oh, do you think God will forgive me if I ask Him?"

"I'm sure He will," answered Donald confidently. "You try."

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CHAPTER XIII.

REPENTANCE.

"AND where are the boys?" asked Vera, as she entered the house about six o'clock in a heavy downpour of rain. The storm had made havoc of the picnic party considerably before the time appointed for its dispersion, and Vera had driven straight home with her contingent on account of the threatening aspect of the weather. Bill had greeted them all rapturously upon their return. But there was no sign of the boys, which was a little odd, seeing that it had been raining fast for an hour or more, and they were hardly likely to stay out in such inclement weather.

"Where is Madge? where are the boys?" repeated Vera? "They are wonderfully quiet. I hope that does not mean they are in mischief.—Yes, Bill dear, you are pleased to see us back; but what have you done with all the rest?"

"They must be out in the boat," said Tiny, "or else Bill would be with them. Bill only stays at

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home when they go on the water. He is so tiresome in the boat, always wanting to jump in and out."

"They can't be out now," said Vera. "They must be indoors."

Tiny shook her head wisely.

"They'd have come rushing out if they were. I'm sure they're in the boat."

A servant now appeared with the news that the young gentlemen and Miss Madge had been out all day. They had taken their lunch away in a basket at half-past eleven, and had not been heard of since. Where had they gone? Nobody knew. They had left no message behind them.

"They must have gone in the boat," said Tiny, "or they would have taken dear Bill. They would never be so unkind as to leave him behind if they were doing anything else."

Vera began to look anxious.

"I'll soon settle that point," said Fred. "We'll see if any of the boats are out."

He dashed off to the boat-house, returning in five minutes with rather a grave face.

"Tiny is right, sure enough," he said. "The large boat is out. They must be out in it."

"Oh Fred, and in this storm! What will become of them?"

"Well, if they've kept in the bay, as we told them, they will be all right, as the cliffs protect it from the full force of the wind; but—"

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That pause made Vera's face turn white.

"But what?" she asked breathlessly.

"But if they are in the bay I cannot imagine why they have stayed out so long. They must have had enough of it long ago. There is no fun pulling about in a chopping sea and under a downpour of rain."

Vera clasped her hands together.

"Oh Fred!" she said softly.

His face was sufficiently serious.

"If they have been tempted out to sea by the fineness of the morning, Heaven only knows what may have happened to them by this time."

"But I told Donald not to go. He said they would not; and he is such a good boy generally."

"There were others beside Donald," answered Fred very gravely. "And Donald is never quite the leading spirit."

"Madge and Fritz often say they won't obey Vera and Fred unless they choose," said Willie, putting in his word with great gravity.—"They said so always, before you came, Vera. When they are naughty they say it still."

Vera laid a hand upon the child's shoulder, as if to check the flow of his confidences. Her eyes were very anxious as she gazed at her brother.

"Lance was there, too," she said; "he is such a good, obedient boy. Oh Fred, with Don and Lance there, surely they would not run into such danger—after what you told them, too."

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"Boys never do believe warnings," said Fred. "And the brightness this morning was undoubtedly deceptive. Lancelot has no backbone, and Donald is much too easy-going. Madge and Fritz are the leading spirits, and they always act in concert. In unity is strength, you know."

Vera was very pale; she spoke with unusual agitation.

"Can nothing be done, Fred?"

"I will see what I can do. At least, we can ascertain if they are in the bay, or if they have landed in any of the coves and are waiting there till the sea goes down. There are plenty of coves where they could shelter if they had a fancy to land there."

There was some consolation in this thought, and Vera urged her brother to make every effort to discover the lost children. He went off in search of help, and she wandered restlessly about the house, too anxious to settle to anything, only able to pace up and down, starting at every sound, her whole being absorbed in one great overmastering sense of expectancy.

It was two hours before any news was brought to her. The children had gone to bed, and Vera was trying hard to still the disquietude of her mind and school her heart to submission whatever might be the issue of this sad day's work, when her brother's approaching step warned her that he had come back. She was calmer now. She had been praying with

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every fibre of her being. She was able to face him now with more tranquillity than she could have done before.

She saw by his face he brought no good news.

"They are nowhere in the bay," he said. "We have been all round. Not a sight of their boat anywhere, and the storm is as bad as ever. There seems little doubt but that they have been carried out to sea; in which case—"

He stopped short suddenly.

"What, Fred?" she asked with white lips.

"Then God alone can save them," he answered, his voice shaking a little. "Sailors call it certain death —such a boat, and only mere lads for the crew."

But Vera put up her hand, as if to ward off a blow.

"Ah no, no!" she cried. "God will save them. I feel sure of it. He is so good—and—and I have been praying to Him."

The last words escaped as if involuntarily. Fred bent over his sister and kissed her.

"I think prayers like yours, Vera, will always be heard," he said.

Then for a few minutes they stood together in silence.

"A telegram for you, ma'am," said a servant, hurriedly entering. "Perhaps it brings news of the young gentlemen."

Vera took it with a trembling hand. Her fingers shook so that she could scarcely open the flimsy

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envelope; but when she had done so, and mastered the contents, she suddenly burst into tears of glad relief.

Fred had read the missive over her shoulder. It had been despatched from Plymouth, and ran as follows :—

"We are here at railway-station. Please come and take us home: we have no more money."

It came in Donald's name.

"Poor darlings! poor darlings!" cried Vera, hurrying away to put on her things. "Fred, look out the next train. Order a fly or something. Oh, I must not lose a moment. My poor little Madge!—the poor dear children! Look and see how soon I can be with them."

By the time she came down again Fred had made all necessary arrangements; but there was still nearly half an hour before it was any use starting. He insisted that Vera should take some dinner, and did the same himself, though neither of them was much inclined for food, and the sister was in a fever of anxiety to reach her missing charges. Still the relief from the strain of suspense and fear was an immense boon, and it seemed as if a leaden load had been lifted off each heart. Fred, indeed, looked a little stern as he talked over the disobedience of the boys which had most likely brought them into this predicament; but Vera felt that until she had the truants safe at home she could not think of anything beyond her own thankful relief and joy.

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It was past ten o'clock when the train steamed into the station at Plymouth. Vera gazed eagerly out of the window and espied Fritz, looking pale and anxious, scanning, with something akin to agitation, the faces of the alighting passengers. When he saw his sister and brother, he rushed up, his face quivering despite his strenuous efforts after calm manliness of deportment.

"Oh, here you are! I am so glad! We thought perhaps you'd be in this train." He got tight hold of Vera's hand, and held it hard. "It was good of you to come yourself. Madge said she knew you would."

Fritz's voice was choked and husky. Vera turned and kissed him, despite the publicity of the place they were in.

"My poor Fritz!—poor dear children! Where are the others? Where are they all?"

"In the waiting-room. We have been there ever so long. We were so wet and tired. Madge is very tired still. She was afraid to come out lest she should cry," concluded Fritz candidly; and he, poor boy, looked as if the tears were very near; they certainly sparkled in Vera's eyes.

"Poor children, poor children!" she murmured, and rapidly followed Fritz to the quiet waiting-room, which at that hour was deserted by all save the little group cowering round the fire. There was a general raising of heads as the door opened, and one

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little figure sprang up and precipitated itself into Vera's arms.

"Oh Vera, Vera!" sobbed Madge, bursting into a tempest of tears. "Oh dear Vera! dear, dear Vera!" and the sobs that followed drowned all other sounds.

"Madge, my poor dear little Madgie! Oh hush, hush! my darling, you will be ill if you cry so bitterly. Poor dear child, you are quite worn out. There, sit down by me and rest your poor little head. That is better. Yes, cry, darling; it will do you good.—Poor dear children, what has happened to you? You look quite knocked up and exhausted.—Yes, Donald dear, you come too; how good it is to see you all again!—Now, Lance, we can make a corner for you; and you must tell us how you got into such a sad plight.—Fred, see if you cannot get them something to eat, and some hot coffee. They are all as white as ghosts.—Have you had no dinner, you poor little children?"

Madge shook her head.

"We couldn't eat—it was too dreadful—"

"But it isn't dreadful now, and you must have something directly.—Fred, go and see what you can do for them." And as the eldest brother departed on this errand, she gathered the sobbing sister and pale-faced boys about her and asked them if they could tell her all about it.

Donald was the most collected; Fritz was still shivering with excitement; and Lancelot was so tired

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he could hardly hold up his head: but the eldest boy was able to give a pretty clear account of that day of peril and fear.

"It was all our disobedience, Vera," he began. "It would never have happened if we had done as you told us."

"Please do forgive us, Vera dear," sobbed Madge. "We have been so naughty; but I feel as if I should never, never want to disobey any more."

Vera kissed her little sister tenderly.

"Indeed I do forgive you, Madgie. I can only think how thankful I am to have you safe under my wing again after those dreadful hours of suspense."

"We hoped our telegram would get almost as soon as you reached home," said Donald.

"The storm drove us home early. But tell me all, Donald. I want to know everything that happened to you."

So Donald told how they had sailed out to sea with a favouring wind; how they had been beguiled by the sunshine and the ease of motion into going far beyond their original goal; how narrowly they had escaped drowning when they had tried to turn; and how at last they had had to drive before the wind at the mercy of the elements.

"I don't know how long it was," said the boy; "it seemed hours and hours and hours, but it could not really have been so long. It was so dark with the storm it seemed as if the night were coming; and

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we knew if the night once fell there would be no hope for us, unless the boat kept afloat all night; and we were getting so cold and stiff with the rain and spray that we could hardly hold the tiller or manage the sail. It was very, very dreadful, Vera; I don't like to think about it. It seemed like being all alone in the middle of the sea—as if no help could ever come to us. And it began to get dark at last—dark with evening coming on; and we'd just begun to give up all hope, when Lancelot saw a sail in the distance. We were afraid at first that it would get away; but we put out all the sail we dared, and skimmed along as fast as ever we could. We almost seemed to fly. Sometimes I thought we should capsize, we tore along at such a rate; but we caught up the lugger at last. She was a sort of fishing-smack, and was making for Plymouth. They took us on board, and towed our boat behind. They were rough sort of men, but they were kind to us, only we couldn't eat what they offered; and the little cabin smelt so, we couldn't stay there, and had to come on deck though it was so wet. By-and-by we got in. We kept a shilling for the telegram, and gave everything else to the captain. I've got his address, and I promised he should have some more, for we'd only six shillings between us. The boat is down there somewhere. I've got the card of the man who said he'd take care of it. I hope it's all right; but we were so dazed and tired by that time that I hardly knew what we

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said or did. We just asked the way to the station, and came here and sent our telegram, and here we've been waiting ever since. Oh Vera, I am so glad you have come to take us home, though it would serve us right if you'd just stayed away and let us shift for ourselves."

"Ah, Don dear, don't!" said Vera, who had listened with breathless interest to this recital.—"Oh, how thankful I am to have you safe back! Poor children! what you have been through! And you must be all wet now. You will catch such bad colds."

"I think we're dry now," said Madge. "The woman here was kind, and lighted us a big fire; but I do so want to get home again."

"We will go by the next train, dear; but you must have something to eat first."

Fred soon came back to conduct them to the dining-room, where they were served with food and hot coffee, of which they stood sorely in need. Meantime the young man drove down to the docks to settle about the transport home of the boat.

Madge was almost too tired to eat at first; but Vera coaxed her to try, and she found by-and-by that she was hungry after all. The boys looked much more like themselves after they had partaken of their meal; and Lancelot kept falling asleep, which made them all laugh, and raised their spirits a little.

All the boys slept in the train going home; but Madge nestled close up to Vera with wide-open eyes,

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and every now and then a shiver ran through her frame.

Vera felt this, and presently looked down to ask,—

"What is it, Madgie? are you cold?"

"No, I'm nice and warm and comfortable; but I can't help thinking, Vera, it all comes back so—those dreadful waves!"

"Poor little girl! don't think about it, Madge. Try and get to sleep, too."

"I couldn't," she answered. "I'm just as wide awake as can be; besides, I think I should dream, and that would be worse. Vera, why is it so very, very dreadful when you think perhaps you will have to die?"

Vera held her little sister very close.

"Was it very dreadful, or was it only the waves and the darkness and the danger that frightened you?"

"It was all dreadful together; but it was death that frightened me most. Vera, good people aren't afraid to die, are they?"

"Some very good people never lose their fear, Madge; and we should all be afraid, I think, out in an open boat in a stormy sea. There is something very terrible in a wild storm like that."

Madge's eyes were sparkling with excitement; she would not be soothed by her elder sister's words, though Vera would have been glad if she could postpone talk like that to a calmer moment. She had no wish that her little sister should think too lightly

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of what had occurred, but she would rather have seen Madge grow calmer first, and get some rest to her strained nerves, before trying to reproduce and analyze her feelings. She had had quite enough upon her mind that day as it was; but the little girl could not rest. She was in a sort of fever of restless excitement.

"No, Vera, it wasn't that," she said. "I wasn't so much afraid of the water and the storm as some people might be. It was very dreadful, but it wasn't that sort of thing that frightened me. I was frightened because I had been naughty—because I have always been self-willed and disobedient and rebellious. I don't know how to *say* it; but I *felt* it then—I saw things quite differently. Everything seemed to look—oh, I can't explain how—not a bit like what it did before. Vera, I want to be different myself now. I don't want ever to have to feel again as I did then. Will you help me, please? You know how."

"You know I will help you, darling, all I can," answered Vera tenderly. "What can I do? What do you want?"

"I don't know. I've got such a heavy load here;" and the little girl laid her hand on her heart. "It feels like lead—I can't get rid of it. I thought it would go when you came—when you had forgiven me; but it hasn't. It is so heavy it hurts me. I feel as if I could never be happy again."

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Vera held her sister very close to her.

"I think I know what you want, dear Madge. You want not only my forgiveness, but that of Somebody else."

Madge glanced up quickly.

"How must I get it?"

"Can you not ask?"

"I don't know—words seem no good. Vera, I don't think I've ever said my prayers properly for ever so long; and now I don't feel as if I could."

Vera's face was grave and tender.

"The power will come by-and-by, darling, if the wish is sincere."

Madge's next words were almost inaudible, but Vera just caught them—

"God seems so very far away."

"But Jesus came to be a sort of link between us. Go to Him, Madge darling; tell Him how sorry you are; ask Him to wash away your sins in His blood, and to give you His good Spirit to cleanse your heart. He will listen, He will understand. He can see that your repentance is sincere, and He will not turn away. He will answer your prayer; and when He has done that, God will not seem far away any more."

Madge clung closer and closer to her sister; the tears began to well up again in her eyes.

"Oh Vera, what a dear, sweet sister you are! Oh, I will never grieve or disobey you again. Indeed, indeed I never will."

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"We shall understand each other and love each other better than ever after this, shall we not?" said Vera. "There is nothing like nearly losing a thing, for finding out how much we prize it."

She spoke with a little touch of playfulness, but Madge's tears only flowed the faster. They were tears of healing, however, that did her good, and lightened the load of oppression that weighed upon her heart. She did not talk any more, but lay very quiet against Vera's supporting shoulder. Perhaps both sisters were praying as the train rushed through the night.

It was very like a dream, arriving at home nearly an hour past midnight. Miss Sefton was up, awaiting their arrival with eager anxiety, not knowing what story she might not have to hear, or whether all the four would be brought safe home; and her kindly wrinkled face showed traces of tears and fears as she came out into the hall when the fly drew up.

Madge, as we know, had always rather despised her governess before; but all that feeling had gone out of her to-night. When she saw Miss Sefton standing under the lamp gazing anxiously out into the darkness, she felt a sudden new feeling rise up in her heart. She rushed up the steps and flung her arms about her neck.

"Dear Miss Sefton, here I am—here we all are! We've not been drowned, though I'm sure we deserved it."

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And Miss Sefton held her in her arms and cried over her, as if she had been the best and most favoured of pupils. And that night, after Madge had gone to bed, comforted at last by Vera's tenderness, and with the heavy load lifted in a great measure from her heart, she opened her sleepy eyes, after a little nap, to see her governess standing at her bedside, candle in hand, shading the light from the face of the sleeper as she bent over her.

Madge rubbed her eyes and half sat up.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked drowsily.

"No, dear, no—don't disturb yourself; but I could not help coming in just to make sure you were all safe. We have been so anxious about you."

Madge looked up with some compunction.

"I did not know you cared for me, Miss Sefton. I've never been nice to you."

"Oh, my dear Madge, don't say that. Oh, if you only knew how thankful I am!"

Tears stood in the honest eyes of the preceptress, and Madge saw them.

"Dear Miss Sefton, I will try to be better," she said, drawing the gray head down and kissing the wrinkled cheek. "I'll never plague you any more if I can help it. I do want to be different from what I have been."

And as Madge felt herself caressed and wrapped up, and composed herself anew to slumber, she said softly to herself,—

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"I will try not to be self-willed any more. I don't think I shall ever want my own way so very much after this. And I won't ask any more to go to school; I'll get fond of Miss Sefton, and learn properly from her."

And soothed and comforted, Madge fell asleep.

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CHAPTER XIV.

IN HARNESS.

THAT perilous adventure was the last incident of any moment that occurred during the Carmichaels' stay in Devonshire. It had a sobering influence upon the boys, whose conduct subsequently was studiously well-behaved and obedient; and upon Madge it left impressions that helped in a great measure to mould her future character.

She did not lose her high spirits; but she was less boisterous, more loving, more amenable to discipline. She treated Miss Sefton with an affectionate cordiality that completely won her heart; made her tell her all about the little nieces and nephews in the country who had had the scarlet fever; and showed an interest and sympathy in her affairs quite new in the harum-scarum Madge. Tiny profited by the change in her sister. She too listened eagerly to Miss Sefton's stories about her little relatives; and when they had heard all about them, the sisters put their heads together and agreed to make each of them a little present, to be sent at Christmas time.

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Tiny loved a secret and a mystery above everything, and Madge was not above entering into the spirit of the thing. They agreed together that Miss Sefton was much more interesting than they had ever thought before; and Madge also made the discovery that her own little sister was not half so much of a baby as she had always believed. Tiny had a fund of shrewd sense of her own, and the elder girl began to find this out for herself very soon.

"You see I never troubled to *think* before," she said to Vera one day. "I used just to take it for granted that people were what I supposed, and never troubled my head about it any more. I made ever such a lot of blunders that way."

Madge had undoubtedly taken to think more upon many subjects of late. She had not become all at once a changed character—real people never do that; but she was thinking more seriously than she had ever done before, and not without good results.

However, the holidays were drawing rapidly to a close, and the return to town was coming very near. The weather had never been settled again after that first September storm, which reconciled the boys better than anything else could have done to a return to the London home. They had had a capital time, as all agreed, and, taking one thing with another, had never enjoyed a holiday more.

Lancelot's only disappointment was that Russell had not joined them for a few days at the end of the

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time; but his funds had held out, and he was still abroad when the party returned to Iddesleigh Gardens.

He only came back the day before school reopened, and walked in as they were all at tea in the dining-room before any one was aware that he had got home, for his movements just at the last had been somewhat uncertain.

He looked very thin and brown, as if he had been walking a great deal; but the old harassed look had left his face, and it was evident he had thoroughly enjoyed himself. He had been mixing more with his fellow-men than he had done before for the last five years, and the change and social intercourse had done him good. Body and mind alike were braced and refreshed.

A few months ago he could never have walked in this unconcerned fashion into any house, least of all into that of the Carmichaels; but his mind had taken a healthier tone of late, and he no longer shrank with such morbid persistency from contact with his fellow-men

The warmth of the welcome he received was undoubtedly reassuring. The boys were vociferous in their expressions of delight, but very indignant that he had not joined them in Devonshire. Tiny clung to his hand and tried to monopolize his notice, and Vera's smile and low-toned greeting were sweeter to him than anything else. He had been half-startled,

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after leaving the country, to find how large a space she occupied in his mental vision, how often he thought of her, how frequently he found himself recalling her words and dwelling upon them in fancy. He tried to check this tendency, but not with very great success.

He was soon installed in his old place between Vera and Tiny, and after having been regaled with several anecdotes about dear Bill and his doings, and renewing his acquaintance with that *quondam* enemy of his, he was suffered to turn his attention in other directions.

He looked at his brother, and then at Vera, with a smile in his eyes.

"What have you done to the boy?" he asked. "He looks another being.—Yes, Lancelot, I am talking of you. You are twice the man you were when you went away."

"I should think I ought to be—such times as we had! You ought to have come down, Russell; it was no end of a jolly place. We just lived out of doors. And the sea!—why did you never tell me what the sea was like? I never had a notion anything could be so downright splendid!"

"Well, it's something to have found it out at last," answered Russell. "And I hope you behaved yourself, and got into no mischief, and didn't make Miss Carmichael repent of her kindness."

Lancelot looked at Vera and laughed, but his colour deepened a little.

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"I was a very good boy on the whole, I think;—wasn't I, Miss Carmichael?" he answered, with a sort of frank, boyish appeal, that made her laugh too. "You didn't want to get rid of me, I'm sure. I was good most days, wasn't I?"

"To be sure you were," she answered—"a very good boy indeed. I think I can give you a character when you want one."

"Now tell us about your doings," said Fred; and Russell gave a brief sketch of his tour, which comprised so much pedestrian-travelling that Fred laughed as he listened.

"Well, if that's your idea of a holiday, it isn't mine," he said. "You must have worked like a horse the whole time."

Vera shook her head, adding,—

"And you wanted rest, I am sure, after that hard year of work."

"Change of work is the best kind of rest, I think, Miss Carmichael. I can't tell you how I enjoyed it all."

"Well, I am very glad of that, at anyrate. It is a great thing to go back fresh to one's daily work."

She fancied a sort of shadow fell across his face at these words; but she was not certain of it, and could ask no questions. But, in point of fact, the mention of return to work recalled to Russell's mind the interview he had just held with Dr. Robertson, from which he had come away decidedly anxious and depressed.

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To Lancelot, as they walked home together an hour or two later, he confided the cause of his anxiety.

He had been accustomed to teach French and German throughout the school; and although he gave lessons in other subjects, modern languages was his specialty—his residence so many years abroad having qualified him for the task, and given him an accent practically indistinguishable from that of a native.

Dr. Robertson himself was perfectly satisfied with the way his assistant-master taught and the progress made by the pupils; but in the minds of many of the parents was a prejudice in favour of foreign masters for foreign tongues; and although the head-master had stood firm for long, he had at last felt obliged to yield the point in deference to the combined representations of many parents.

"He has engaged two masters already—one a Frenchman and another a German," said Russell; "and I suppose he could not do otherwise. He does not like it himself. He does not think foreigners will manage the boys or teach them as successfully; but the parents will think it is right, will be satisfied that their sons are having every advantage, and so there is little chance of any change back to old ways. And the French and German being taken away, the inevitable fact remains that my services are no longer required, though Dr. Robertson has not exactly said so."

Lancelot's face fell ominously. He looked anxiously at Russell.

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"Do you mean you think you'll get the sack?"

"I mean that I am very doubtful if I shall get work there after Christmas," he answered gravely. "This term it is all right. I am to take in hand the boys who are going in for the senior and junior Cambridge, and do all the special coaching. There are to be extra classes and evening classes, and I am to undertake the business, and have the same salary as before. Of course it will mean a good lot of extra work, because I've had no notice of it, and haven't read up the special subjects, which I must do as quickly as I can. But that's not what bothers me. The real gist of the thing is that it is patent enough I shall not be wanted much longer in the school. Robertson hinted as much himself, though very kindly, spoke about being sorry to lose me, and all that, but intimated very plainly that it would be to my own interest to look out for something better than the small amount of teaching he should have to offer after this next term closed. He can give me excellent testimonials, he says—I shall have no difficulty, with my talents. All that sort of thing comes very pat and sounds encouraging; but when it comes to the dreary task of seeking employment in a terribly overcrowded market, then comes the tug-of-war."

Lancelot had recollections of that tug-of-war a few years back. He looked very grave.

"I have time before me," said Russell,—"that at least is something; and I have been lucky enough to

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get some more work to do similar to the last, the fruit of which has just taken me abroad. Had I known what was coming, I should not have indulged myself in that luxury; but Robertson never so much as dropped a hint. Unluckily, these extra classes at odd times will cut into my half-holidays and evenings a good bit; but I must do what I can. I may get some more coaching to do. Young Carmichael passed very well, and he said he'd speak a good word for me; but all that is quite in the clouds, and I must try for something regular."

"Perhaps the Carmichaels would help you if they knew," suggested Lancelot.

But Russell's face contracted in the old way the boy knew so well.

"Lance, you are not to mention this to the Carmichaels. I have always managed to fight my own battle so far, and I will do it if possible to the end. I know they are our friends, that they are very kind and very wealthy; but they have done quite enough for us already. I do not wish to burden ourselves with obligations. Mind what I say, Lancelot—say nothing to any of them. I will do all I can to find employment, and I daresay I shall succeed; but —somehow—I do not wish to owe my success to them."

Lancelot did not quite understand this prohibition; but he had found out long ago that there were limitations to his comprehension of his brother's character;

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and he had grown used to accept things as they were without troubling himself much over the whys or wherefores.

"All right," he answered, "just as you like. I'll keep it dark."

"Mind you do. There's no object to be gained in bothering other people over our own private affairs."

But the shadow hanging over the future cast an inevitable gloom over the home-coming of the brothers, if such a word is applicable to their return to their humble lodgings; and they both found difficulty, in their respective ways, in buckling to harness again.

Lancelot felt painfully the change from large, airy rooms, plentiful, generous fare, and free out-of-door life; and Russell, though always ready for hard work, often found it difficult to keep his thoughts engrossed on what was before him, with all the suspense and uncertainty of the future preying on his mind.

He tried to be hopeful and brave; he tried to strengthen his faith by calling to mind the successful issues of past trials: yet the remembrance of those weary days of struggle and hardship would force itself upon him with pitiless distinctness; and he felt that he had not in himself the same spring and elasticity that he could boast five years ago. The strain of hard work and anxiety and poverty had told upon him to a certain extent, and despite the fact that he was but seven-and-twenty, he no longer felt himself a young man.

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However, he meant to do his utmost, and he trusted that in time something would turn up. Meanwhile he was very busy, and had not over-much time to indulge in anxious reveries.

Now and again, at leisure moments, he would get Lance to tell him of his sea-side life and adventures; and in due course he heard the whole story of their narrow escape from death. He looked so very grave and thoughtful after listening to the account of their perils, that the boy was inclined to rally him about it.

"You needn't pull such a long face, old boy," he said. "Here I am, safely out of it. It was bad enough at the time; but it all came right at last, as things generally do."

"Generally—not always," said Russell gravely.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you may yield to temptation once too often, Lancelot, and things may *not* come right again. Indeed nothing can make wrong right, however well the end may seem to be."

Lancelot looked half amused, half cross. He did not care for quite such a serious tone.

"What a fellow you are!" he grumbled, half laughing. "You do take things so awfully seriously."

Russell leaned his head on his hand and said nothing; but that did not suit the boy either.

"Come, out with it," he cried. "I see it's on your mind. What is it makes you so awfully solemn?"

Russell looked at his young brother with a very

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eloquent glance. It spoke a great deal of silent love and solicitude.

"Lance, my boy," he said, "it's only the old story, you are tired of hearing about. It always makes me anxious when I see you led away by others into wrong-doing—giving way to impulse against your better judgment. Whenever will you learn to stand firm and say 'No,' like a man?"

"Oh, some day," answered Lancelot gaily. "I can't be as old or as wise as you are, Russell. It wouldn't be natural if I were. But I don't often make a blunder. Come now, old fellow, be just. I don't often do a thing like that, do I now?"

Russell smiled a little at this ingenuous appeal.

"Possibly the temptation does not come very often, Lance, my boy. What I want to see is your standing up against it."

"Well, you shall," answered Lancelot, with great sincerity; "indeed you shall. I don't forget what you say, though I can't always keep it in mind. I will try. I really will."

"That is right. People don't try for nothing when they try in the right way."

There was silence for awhile, which Lancelot broke. It was a wild, stormy Sunday evening, and the brothers were sitting over their fire in unaccustomed idleness.

"Russell," said Lancelot suddenly, "have we any relations?"

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The elder brother looked surprised at the question.

"None that I know anything about. What makes you ask?"

"Well, I've often thought of asking. Most other fellows have some kind of relations, you know. Why haven't we?"

"Well, perhaps we have somewhere, only I know nothing about them. You see living abroad so long breaks ties a good bit."

"It would be rather jolly to have some people belonging to us," said Lance—"people we could spend Christmas with and go to in the summer for a change. It seems odd that there isn't any one belonging to us."

"Well, I don't know. Plenty of fellows are in the same boat."

"Miss Carmichael was asking me about it one day," added Lancelot. "I think that was what put it in my head."

"Miss Carmichael, was she?"

"Yes; she began by asking if we'd any relations called Gordon."

Russell took up the poker and began to stir the fire with some vigour.

"What made her ask that?"

"She said I reminded her of some one; but I don't think she was quite clear about it."

Russell glanced at his brother from beneath his bent brows.

"What did you say?"

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"I said we hadn't any. I suppose that was all right?"

"Quite right. None that I know of, at anyrate."

"Thought not. We don't seem to have anybody belonging to us—nobody to help us if we get into low water again;" and the boy glanced up at his brother, for he knew that Russell had heard of no fresh employment, and October was now on the wane.

"And nobody dependent upon us either, old boy, don't forget that. There are two sides to every question, you know;" and Russell smiled bravely, for he did not wish the cloud that shadowed his own life to rest heavily upon his brother, at anyrate before it need. Perhaps, after all, it would disperse in time.

"I am dependent upon you, Russell," said Lancelot thoughtfully. "You would not get half so worried if you had not me to think for too."

"Foolish boy, as if you did not make all the sunshine of our home! A nice sort of fellow I should be, living all by myself! No, Lance boy, it is not as you think. I believe, from what Dr. Robertson said, that he will let you go on at school as before, and trust me for the fees if I have any difficulty in finding employment; and there are several of your friends who have asked you from time to time to visit them, and to whom you could go for a little while if we have to give up these rooms and look further afield. No, Lance, I am not worrying myself unduly on your account. Of course, I cannot help being anxious; but

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I fully believe we shall find a way out of our difficulties this time, as we have done before."

Lancelot for once took a less hopeful view of the situation.

"If you don't wear yourself into your grave first, as I sometimes fancy you will. It seems hard lines sometimes that we've nobody to care for us or help us."

Russell was looking into the fire thoughtfully. He smiled a little to himself.

"You're out there, Lancelot. We're not so badly off as all that."

The boy was silent awhile. He studied his brother's face with some attention; then he said, with a sort of impatient vehemence,—

"It's no go, Russell; I can't feel as you do. I'm not religious, and I don't believe I ever shall be. I don't mean anything very bad, you know; but I can't see that what you sometimes imply about being helped or cared for ever comes to anything. All the good things that we get—and they are precious few—come because you slave like a darky to get them. Nothing seems sent us any other way. Sometimes I think very few fellows have such hard times as we do."

Russell sat in silent thought. He was aware that Lancelot had lost a little of his old blitheness and buoyancy; that the two months of enjoyment in Devonshire had somewhat unsettled and unfitted him for the rigid economy necessary in their little *ménage;*

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but he had never heard the boy speak out quite so openly before. He was very sorry for him: he often felt peculiarly tender towards this young brother, who had never tasted the pleasures of a bright, luxurious, happy childhood, such as he himself had known. Perhaps he was really the happier for being in ignorance of what he had lost; but Russell often wished that the boy had enjoyed something of the sweetness that he himself had known before the dark shadow fell upon him,—longed to give him something of the pleasure and ease to which he had in a sense been born; but there was little prospect now of realizing this dream.

So Lancelot's outburst did not shock him, hardly surprised him. His own faith had often been shaken in past years; could he wonder that his brother's sometimes wavered a little?

"You will see things clearer as you grow older, Lancelot," he said quietly. "It is wonderful how much we learn when we are able to look at our lives in perspective."

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CHAPTER XV.

DARK DAYS.

AS days passed on and merged into weeks, and still Russell had heard of nothing to take the place of the mastership he was about to lose at Dr. Robertson's, Lancelot began to feel that he had not been mistaken in the gloomy forebodings in which he had for once indulged. He saw his brother's face growing lined with anxious thought; he marked the relentless energy with which he worked, hardly sparing himself a single hour's relaxation from one week's end to another; and he knew that he was thus toiling now, whilst he had work to do, that he might have some slender provision laid up against the time when he should be turned adrift again to fight his battle with the hard world.

Certainly things were very hard upon Russell just now, as Lancelot could plainly see. The new work that had been given him to do in the school involved the expenditure of much time in careful and special study of the books and subjects in which he was

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required to coach the examination competitors. Then the extra classes and the evening lectures were a great drain on his time, by no means compensated for by odd hours of leisure during the day. He wanted to give his evenings to the British Museum, and get on with the other work he had in hand; but with his time so cut up as was now the case, he could only get on slowly with this work, and despite his unremitting industry, he saw little chance of getting it out of hand by Christmas, as he had half pledged himself to do.

It was not unnatural that all these lonely evenings told upon Lancelot's spirits. Russell was almost always out, either at the school or the Museum; and the boy, in his absence, had leisure to feel his loneliness and to indulge sad thoughts and forebodings.

He went pretty often to his friends the Carmichaels, but only for an hour on his way from school. Donald and Fritz were both going up for the Cambridge "exam," one a senior and the other a junior, so their evenings were chiefly spent over their books; and often they had to go back to the school for an evening lecture, and Lancelot never attempted to prolong his stay much over the tea hour. Nobody noticed his pale, wistful looks. Boys are proverbially thoughtless, however kind-hearted they may be; and Fred was not living at home, having a hospital appointment that would keep him for three months an inmate of the building. He was therefore away till

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Christmas, which perhaps accounted for Russell's never going near the house. Vera had asked once or twice at the beginning of the term why he never came, but hearing how busy he was she ceased to press the point; and early in November Vera herself had gone away—gone away for six weeks, to pay a round of visits to relatives and friends whom she had not seen since her childhood; and the house was once again left to the joint-care of Raby and Miss Sefton.

It was, however, a very different household from the one she had found six months before. Her labour of love had not been thrown away, and there was little danger of things slipping back into the old state of disorganization. Yet she was sadly missed in the house, and perhaps nobody missed her more than Lancelot.

He could not have put the feeling into words, but he felt somehow, when she had gone, as if his sheet-anchor had been taken away—as if, whatever happened now, there was no one to turn to, no one who would understand.

It was not that he had ever had any intention, after Russell's prohibition, of confiding his anxieties to Vera; indeed he was growing to feel a sort of shrinking himself, as he advanced in years, from letting the difficulties of their position be known: but he had a feeling that she would know if they were in trouble, and give them that sort of sym-

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pathy which brings help and not humiliation to the recipient; and that if things were very bad indeed she would be able to show them a way out of the difficulty, and that without a word that could hurt even Russell's sensitive pride and independence. Lancelot had a sort of blind faith and love for Vera, and missed her sadly when she had gone. He had lost some of his old buoyancy of spirit, and often felt he would much rather have enjoyed a quiet talk with her than join in the boys' boisterous play.

And a new anxiety arose shortly for the boy, when his brother developed a severe cold and cough, which he seemed quite unable to throw off.

Russell had been subject to bad winter coughs all his life, but had never troubled himself much about them. They pulled him down for a time, but he would get rid of them by degrees without laying up or taking any special care of himself. But this particular and most inclement November he seemed to get worse rather than better; and his inability to spend his evenings at home gave him very little chance of getting the better of the enemy.

The season, too, was extraordinarily bad. The cold had come unusually early. There were frosts at night, snow and hail storms by day, fogs and thaws and more frosts following on in bewildering rapidity; and the constant changes of temperature were trying even to the robust, and terribly bad for delicate chests.

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Russell kept up his heart and spirit bravely, but he began to look very ill, and Lancelot was proportionately miserable. Like many men of his calibre, he bore up with more cheerfulness and resolution in the teeth of imminent misfortune and almost inevitable distress than he had sometimes done when trouble loomed farther away against the horizon. He braced himself with all the determination of an iron will not to give way either physically or morally, and in these days his was the brighter spirit of the two.

Sometimes a terrible misgiving would come over him that he might break down and be ill, for he felt sufficiently weak and weary at times, and almost unable to get through his long day's work; but he would take heart again, remembering how often he had felt the same before and yet had avoided any ill results, and he held bravely on his way, resolving not to be beaten even now.

But Lancelot was increasingly anxious about him, as the boys at school began to comment on his looks; and he saw with what difficulty sometimes Russell struggled through his lectures. He had a sort of notion, too, that he coughed almost all night long, after he had been out in the raw evening air; and his uneasiness was not diminished by a warning administered by Mr. Wells, their fellow-lodger, who had always kept up a friendly intercourse with them, though he and Russell were both too busy to see each other often.

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"I say, Lancelot," he said to the boy, meeting him on the stairs one day, "you must be careful of that brother of yours. He has a horrid cough—the kind of cough that won't bear trifling with. Can't you manage to keep him in at nights more?"

Lancelot shook his head.

"I'm afraid not."

"He ought not to be out after dark such weather as this until he is better. Can't you persuade him to stay in?"

"He's got work to do at the school. He can't help himself. He'd be glad enough to stay if he could."

Mr. Wells shook his head.

"Something ought to be done," he said half aloud, "if one only knew what."

It was growing dark now. A gust of wind blew a heavy scud of sleety rain against the staircase window.

"Where is your brother now?" asked the young man quickly.

"On his way to the British Museum," answered the boy.

"In a cab, I hope."

"An omnibus, more likely."

"If this sleet turns to snow—as seems likely enough, for it has turned fearfully cold—how is he to get back?"

Lance shook his head helplessly. He looked so unhappy that Mr. Wells said kindly,—

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"Look here: come into my room, and have dinner with me, and spend the evening there. It's dull work for us both alone on a night like this. If your brother has any sense he will come home early, seeing what kind of a night it is likely to turn out. You shall stay with me till he gets back, and I'll read him a serious lecture as to his imprudence."

Lance's face brightened wonderfully at this suggestion.

"How awfully good of you to ask me! Thanks ever so much. If I shan't be in your way I should like nothing better. It is dull all alone, and one can't always keep up one's spirits, especially just now. I'd be glad enough if you could stop Russell's going out at night, only really I don't see how he can. He doesn't want to be imprudent himself, but he sees no way out of it."

"I know, I know," answered Mr. Wells kindly. "It is very difficult to manage matters sometimes, only a short holiday taken in time is better than a long one forced upon one by illness. A man must think of that."

"Russell often gets bad coughs in the winter," said Lancelot, seating himself comfortably by his friend's cheerful fire, "but they go away in time. You see it is nearly the end of November now, and about the tenth of next month the examinations begin, and he will have nothing to do then but go with the boys to Burlington House, and that will be all easy enough.

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It's only for a week or two more that the evening classes will last, and when the holidays begin he can go to the Museum in the morning."

Mr. Wells said no more on the subject, but talked pleasantly to his young guest on all sorts of subjects whilst they dined together, and he smoked his pipe afterwards.

Lancelot enjoyed himself exceedingly. The change, the good dinner, the lively conversation, brightened him up wonderfully, and since the sojourn in Devonshire he had grown sufficiently intimate with his host to feel quite at ease in his presence.

They talked of the Carmichaels, of the loss Vera was to the house, and of many other subjects of mutual interest. Lancelot knew that Mr. Wells and Raby were practically engaged, although, as she was still young, the matter was not much talked of just yet; and he made his presence agreeable by many mentions of her name and stories of her little acts of good-natured kindness to himself in bygone days.

Time fled along very fast in this way, but still Russell did not come. Generally he was in before ten, but the half-hour struck, and still there was no sign of him. The boy grew anxious, Mr. Wells looked grave, and by-and-by he crossed the room, drew aside curtain and blind, and looked out into the street.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, with a long, low whistle of astonishment; "this accounts for it perhaps."

Lancelot came and looked too. The street was

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inches deep in snow that was still falling fast, freezing as it fell in the icy air, and drifting with the blasts of wind to a much greater depth. Hardly a foot-passenger was to be seen in the street, and those that there were seemed to have great difficulty in getting along. Wind and snow and the bitter cold evidently made progress a matter of extreme difficulty.

"What a night for your brother to be out!" exclaimed Mr. Wells.

"I must go out and try to find him!" cried Lance suddenly. "Oh, why didn't I think of that before? I wonder where he can be — which way he has come?"

The boy was darting away, but Mr. Wells laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"It isn't the slightest use your doing that. You haven't an idea what route he would take. You would be certain to miss, and then he would feel it his duty to go out after you. Wait here; he will come presently. This snow must have detained him, but the streets are not impassable. He will be all right as far as getting along goes; but he should not be out in such inclement weather."

"I'll go and see if our fire is alight. I must get him some supper ready. I daresay he has had nothing since dinner at school. He's an awful fellow for forgetting his food."

"No; bring him here," said Mr. Wells. "This room will be twice as warm. I'll tell them to get

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some soup ready. That will be the best thing for him. There he is, I think. Isn't that he across the way, struggling with the elements?"

But Lance was off before the question was put.

Russell came slowly up the steps, panting and exhausted; but he smiled as he saw the anxious look upon his brother's face.

"All right, Lance; here I am. Shocking bad night, isn't it?—not an omnibus on the route. But all's well that ends well. Have you been anxious?"

"No; I didn't know what a night it was till just now. Mr. Wells asked me into his room for the evening. But you're soaked, Russell, through and through. Off with your topcoat directly."

The thin topcoat had not done much to keep out the cold and wet; still when it was removed Russell presented a less frozen appearance.

"What a mess I am making in Mrs. Norris's hall!" he said. "How cross she will be! Let us go upstairs now. Have you a decent fire?"

"Yes, in Mr. Wells's room. Come on, Russell. You do look pinched up and miserable, but we'll soon have you all right now."

Russell essayed to mount the stairs, but he did so with manifest difficulty. He was numbed and exhausted with his long battle through the snow, his breath was laboured and short, and a violent fit of coughing forced him to lean against the wall for support.

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Lancelot was frightened. He had never seen his brother look quite so ill before. But Russell recovered himself after a few minutes, and reached the warm room without much more difficulty. When once there, however, his strength seemed quite to give way. He sank into a chair by the fire and coughed till he was absolutely exhausted; and the cough was obviously attended with acute pain.

Mr. Wells eyed him gravely, and said quietly to Lancelot,—

"Go and light a big fire in your brother's bedroom, and warm the bed thoroughly. Get up the temperature as fast as ever you can."

Russell heard nothing; he was still coughing in painful paroxysms. Presently he looked up, and missing Lancelot, took the opportunity to say in low tones,—

"Do you think I am in for anything at last?"

The question was accompanied by a look that roused Mr. Wells's sincere compassion, but he knew too much to be hopeful.

"I think you are in for a week or two of bed," he answered cheerfully; "but that's the kind of thing every fellow experiences some time or other. You've not been so careful of yourself as you should this sort of weather, and you'll have to pay the penalty for a spell now."

"I've been as careful as I could," answered Russell. "I could not always help myself;" the words were

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extinguished in a kind of gasp, and he put his hand to his side.

"Pain there?"

Russell nodded; he could not speak. He felt as if a knife were running through him.

He could not touch the soup when it came, and by the time he had got to bed he was in a high fever. It was obvious that he had taken a violent chill, and was in a decidedly critical state. Pleuro-pneumonia had attacked his lungs, and the case was likely to prove a serious one.

Some of this Lance learned from Mr. Wells, some from the doctor who was called in next day. Russell was very ill—dangerously ill—as he knew himself by the frequency of the doctor's visits, and by the urgency of his symptoms. But despite the height of the fever, he did not lose the power of thought. His mind was quite clear.

"Lance," he whispered the following morning, "you must go to Dr. Robertson and tell him all. Take him my resignation; there is no chance, I hear, of my doing anything this term, and he does not want me later. Tell him I am very sorry. I tried hard to keep up to the end. I've—"

But talking was too difficult to be possible many moments together, and Lancelot went away with a very heavy heart.

The head-master was very kind. He expressed himself much concerned to hear of Russell's illness,

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spoke very highly of his services, and insisted on paying there and then the salary for the whole quarter. He did not know much of the circumstances of the Grahams, but he was a practical, kind-hearted man; and, as he said to Lancelot, "money was always useful, and especially so when there was illness in the case." He also told the boy he should expect him to finish his year at school; and hinted, delicately enough, that the question of fees could stand over indefinitely. Till the following midsummer, at least, he was welcome to come at any terms. Lancelot thanked him, and ran home with a somewhat lightened heart.

Russell was able to listen to his account of his interview with the head-master; but that was the last thing for many days that he was able to think of. He was exceedingly ill for a long time—far too ill to take any heed of what went on about him, lying, or rather sitting, propped up by pillows, in the listless state induced by high fever, not knowing day from night, or having any idea of the flight of time, and only barely distinguishing one face from another, and that by rather a painful mental effort.

He was not delirious, but life for two long weary weeks was nothing but a strange, oppressive dream.

Poor Lancelot suffered very much during those most trying days. He always looked back upon them with a kind of shudder. He was thankful that Russell was spared the consuming anxiety that preyed so much upon his own mind—that terrible fear that

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the money would all be spent, and that there would be no more coming in; thankful that the patient's physical state precluded him from exhausting himself by anxious calculations and dismal forebodings. But the way in which money melted was absolutely appalling to Lancelot. He had not his brother's faculty of rigid economy, and indeed in the face of mortal illness rigid economy was out of the question.

Large fires had to be kept night and day in the patient's room; strong beef-tea made meat fly with appalling rapidity, yet it was absolutely essential that Russell should have it; whilst the shillings and half-crowns that passed the chemist's counter in return for the bottles of medicine and drugs ordered by the doctor made Lancelot shiver to calculate. Russell had never allowed any bills to be run, and this habit had become so confirmed that Lance never tried to open an account with any of the trades-people. "What we can't pay for we can go without," had been Russell's invariable maxim, and it did not occur to the boy to run into debt whilst he had a shilling to call his own.

The additional heavy expense of a nurse for Russell was only saved by the extreme kindness of Mr. Wells and Miss Sefton, who would often come up and sit for many hours beside the patient, whilst Lancelot snatched some sorely-needed hours of repose; and one or two nights each week the worthy governess insisted on sitting up herself during the crisis of the illness,

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that the boy might husband his strength and keep up under the strain imposed upon him.

"Your brother was kindness itself to me when I needed help," she sometimes said. "It would be strange if I were not ready to do a little for him now that he needs it. The more I can help you the better I shall be pleased."

Mr. Wells was equally kind in his way, and without them Lancelot must certainly have broken down himself; but they neither of them suspected the true circumstances of the brothers, or had any idea of the state of absolute destitution that almost stared them in the face. The Continental tour which Russell had taken had given to many people the idea that there could be no stress of poverty in that quarter, and the ease with which Lancelot supplied everything that was ordered for his brother confirmed the impression that there was money in the background. No one knew Russell had lost his position at the school, or that there was any special cause for anxiety in the future; and Lancelot, with a sort of morbid shrinking, now that the worst had almost come, from letting it be known, never said a word that could tend towards enlightening those about him.

Trouble and anxiety were rather unhinging Lancelot; he took strained and morbid views of people and things. He felt as if in his trouble he were being deserted by every one. His school friends, who had professed affection for him once, never came near him

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now; even the Carmichaels, he told himself, had almost deserted him.

This was not a fair way of looking at the matter, in reality; for Fred and Vera were from home, and knew nothing of what was passing; Donald and Fritz were in the thick of examination pressure, and really had not time or thought for anything else; and the girls heard regularly from Miss Sefton as to the condition of the patient, without perpetually sending to inquire.

Had Vera been at home, undoubtedly some more substantial marks of remembrance would have been smuggled in to the invalid; but Raby was too young and too much engrossed in her own affairs to think of that kind of thing, and Miss Sefton too diffident to make any suggestions.

So poor Lancelot, with his brother too ill to speak a cheering word, almost too ill to know him, deserted as he felt by his friends, and burdened by a load of care and anxiety that he could share with nobody, was more miserable than he had ever been in his life before; and he had not learned the lesson of carrying his troubles to the one Friend and Father whose ears are ever open to the voices of His children.

It never occurred to Lancelot to ask God's help and guidance in these dark days. Had the thought come into his mind it would have been gloomily dismissed as "no good." He was very sorrowful, very lonely, very miserable; but he had no idea he was

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turning his back on comfort that always is, and always will be, a very present help in time of trouble to those who will but take what is so lovingly held out.

For a whole long fortnight Russell lay in a very dangerous state, hovering between life and death. Inflammation had attacked both lungs, and was complicated by pleurisy. The doctor looked very grave over him, and there were long days and nights when Lancelot saw that he feared the very worst. But youth is very strong, and Russell's constitution, despite the liberties taken with it, was excellent still and perfectly sound. He struggled gallantly with the foe, and youth and strength at last won the hard-fought fight.

There came a day when the fever began to abate, when the breathing became easier and slower, and the patient's face wore a less strained and haggard look, that the doctor's eye was not slow to detect.

Mr. Wells smiled and nodded to Lancelot when he came up in the evening, and told him in confidence that he believed the worst was over. Russell seemed to catch the whisper: he had not been able to notice anything that had passed for many days, but he now made a sort of sign of assent.

It was a relief to hear this much; yet Lancelot did not know if what he dreaded most was not Russell's full return to a consciousness of their real circumstances.

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CHAPTER XVI.

LANCELOT'S FALL.

"ALL he wants now is good, nourishing food, and plenty of it," said the doctor as Lancelot went downstairs with him after a visit paid to Russell about five days after he had taken a turn for the better. "He has got on wonderfully—wonderfully this last week. He has thrown off the worst symptoms in the best possible way. I never knew lungs mend so quickly. All he wants now is regular, systematic feeding up. Give him as much light, nourishing food as ever he can take. His appetite is coming back. He is growing as hungry as a hunter. Give him as much as you can get him to take; and in a day or two we will have a tremendous fire in the other room, and let him hobble in there for an hour or two. As soon as he gets up his strength a little he will enjoy a change. He is a very satisfactory case—very. Now mind what I tell you, for he is in that state where all depends on good food. If he doesn't get that he will just sink from exhaustion, as you snuff out a candle."

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And the doctor nodded pleasantly to Lancelot and let himself out at the door. He was a chatty, kindly little man, who had not a notion of the pain he was inflicting by his words. Hitherto everything he had ordered for his patient had been procured without any difficulty or delay; it was natural he should believe that money was plentiful with the brothers—as plentiful, at least, as there was need for.

Lancelot stood on the last flight of stairs in the quiet house, and looked into the purse he held clasped in his hand. It contained one half-crown and a few small pieces of silver. That was all the money he had left, and the rent of their rooms had only been paid up till Christmas. In twelve days more they would be at the mercy of the not too tender-hearted Mrs. Norris. Before the day was out they would be penniless. What was to be done?

The boy looked helplessly round him and saw hope nowhere. Miss Sefton had gone to her brother's, having been granted an extra ten days' holiday on account of having had to remain with her pupils during the summer. Mr. Wells had likewise gone away on a visit, and would not be back till after Christmas. Who else was there? The Carmichaels? But Russell would so hate their being applied to for help. And Vera was away, the boys were in the thick of examination, whilst Mr. Carmichael was a man of whom Lancelot stood in some considerable awe. He was always kind to the boy; but he was one of those tall,

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portly, somewhat ceremonious men, in whose presence young people find it difficult to be at ease. Could he make up his mind to apply to him?

Slowly the boy ascended the stairs and entered his brother's room. Russell was asleep, sleeping in the quiet, refreshing, health-giving way that follows recovery from severe illness. How white and wasted he looked—a mere shadow of his old self; and yet the doctor spoke as if he might get up in a few days if—

Ah, but what an "if" that was, when a few shillings was all the boy's store of wealth, and when fuel and food alike wanted ordering in before another day had passed! What would the tradesmen say if Lancelot explained that he had no money and no prospect of getting any? Would they trust him? He thought not.

He looked at the unconscious face upon the pillow, and a wave of love and tenderness swept over him. What had not his brother been to him all these years? Had he not slaved, and toiled, and sometimes almost starved for him? Recent experiences brought home to Lancelot a conviction of much that Russell must silently have endured in order that he might not know want; and now that he was laid low, could no return be made to him? Was he to be allowed to relapse, possibly to die, for want of the necessaries of life he had toiled so manfully to obtain for both until he had fairly dropped down in harness? Lancelot set his teeth hard and took his hat.

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He wrote on a slip of paper, "Gone out for half an hour," and put it where it would catch his brother's eye; and then, leaving the room as softly as he had entered it, he ran lightly downstairs, and never paused until he found himself in the failing light of the dusky streets.

He had no special plan in his head, but he turned mechanically towards the familiar house in Iddesleigh Gardens. It was just between lights, and neither streets nor houses had yet been lighted up although the day was waning fast. As he approached the familiar door he saw that it stood wide open, no one near it; whilst some little distance down the street the butler was putting into her carriage some visitor who had evidently just been calling.

At the moment Lancelot thought nothing of the chance that enabled him to enter the house unobserved, yet he was conscious of an odd sort of shrinking from observation; and instead of going boldly in search of any of his companions, he quietly slipped into Mr. Carmichael's study, the door of which stood half open.

He had seen that the room was empty, and he mechanically pulled the door to behind him. He had not yet settled what to do, nor could he have told why he had come, but it was with some vague idea, he was aware, of getting assistance from the benevolent master of the house. But to beg—to turn beggar—he, Russell Graham's brother! It was unspeakably humiliating; what would Russell say if ever

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it came to his ears? Oh, he could not do it; how could he get the words out? If only Vera were here it might be easy; but now, was there no other way?

Mechanically the boy's eyes roved about the room, not seeing much though moving restlessly from place to place. At last they rested upon a small sheaf of papers lying just within a half-open drawer; and when he looked more closely at them, he gave a great start.

It was quite a thick bundle of Bank of England notes—so much Lancelot could see at a glance. On the top was one for fifty pounds. A curious thrill ran through Lancelot. He did not pause to think or to reason. He was aware of a strange, overmastering temptation: he felt all at once as if he were living in a wild dream; as if for a moment no such thing existed as moral responsibility; as if nothing in all the world were real save the absolute necessity of obtaining for Russell those things on which his very life depended.

He pulled the drawer a little more open; he turned over the sheaf of notes. There were a great many of them; several more for fifty pounds, others for twenty, five-and-twenty, ten. Then quietly and dexterously he pulled out the top note, laid the bundle back in its place, left the drawer exactly as he found it, and folded up the note in his almost empty purse. Then he went to the door and listened intently. Not a sound in the hall without. Lancelot slipped across

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it like a shadow, opened noiselessly the front door, and closed it behind him without a sound. Not a soul had known of his twilight visit to the house, and he was stealing away with fifty pounds in his pocket.

Of the suspicion that might attach to others when the loss was made known he was in no condition to think. Days and nights of anxious watching, combined with that terrible, haunting fear of what was coming upon them, had produced such an effect upon the boy's unballasted nature as to render him really unconscious for the moment of the terrible thing he had actually done. The morbid fear that had dwelt of late with such terrible persistency upon his mind had unhinged his reasoning powers from a moral, though not from an intellectual standpoint, and he felt no remorse for his act—only a sort of strange triumph curiously mingled with dread. The lad had never been in the habit of thinking seriously, of taking his character in hand and battling against the inherent weakness of his temperament. He had been content to drift idly and easily along life's current, thinking that because he had never done anything very bad so far, he never should be tempted so to transgress. His brother's warnings had been listened to, but had not been specially heeded. Sunny-hearted Lance had never seen much harm in himself, any more than he was given to seeing harm in other people. He was always liked wherever he went; there surely

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could not be much amiss with him; and now, even in the hour of his deep moral fall, he was scarcely aware that he had fallen.

Shame and sorrow by no means always follow immediately upon wrong-doing. When the boy was once clear of the neighbourhood of the great house, his spirits rose with a certain elasticity they had not known for many days. He went boldly into the coal-merchant's shop where he was accustomed to deal, ordered as much coal as their coal-box on the landing would contain, and asked for change for his note. It was given without any demur, Lance only being asked to write his name on the back; which he did with rather a shaking hand. He could not see how he committed himself in doing this, and soon got over the momentary feeling of uneasiness it occasioned.

He went round to a number of shops, ordering in such things as were necessary, and returned home (strange as it may sound) with a lightened heart. At least Russell was provided with all that was necessary for his recovery. Convalescence would be retarded neither by the need of those things that an hour ago had seemed unattainable, nor by the terrible anxiety that their funds would not hold out until his strength returned. If these objects had been attained, what did anything else matter? Lancelot asked himself the question almost fiercely; and the answer was, "Nothing, nothing!"

Russell was awake when he got back—awake and

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better; and they enjoyed their tea together in quite a sociable fashion again. The patient's appetite was returning, and Lancelot delighted to carry out the doctor's orders and feed him up. He had not had so much good, nourishing food for years; and the consequence was that he responded wonderfully to the generous diet, and made progress that fairly astonished the little chatty medical man. He was able at the end of a week to crawl into the adjoining room: it seemed as if by the time Christmas day came that he would be in a fair way of recovery.

Lancelot's delight at seeing this satisfactory state of things served to deaden his own remorse; indeed so far he felt none. He put aside all thoughts of that one strange half-hour of his life, and never allowed his mind to dwell upon it. Russell was getting better; he owed his recovery in a great measure to that one act of his brother's. Detection of that act was, he believed, practically impossible. Lancelot dismissed the whole subject from his mind with a sort of defiant resolution, was actually happy in the present, and even hopeful for the future.

It was a proof how much Russell had been weakened by this sharp attack of illness, that he was willing for so long to go on accepting life as it came, without asking questions or trying to take back the reins into his own hands. It was not until he was able to leave his bed and get into the sitting-room again that he attempted to put any questions to his brother. But

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on the second day, when a sense of slowly returning power gave him strength for more of consecutive thought than had been possible before, he began to make the inquiries Lancelot had long been expecting.

"Now, Lance, tell me, are the funds holding out?"

"Oh yes, capitally. You can't think how well I've been managing."

Russell had been much too ill to have any idea what the recent expenses had been; and as he had had something in hand to start with, and his quarter's salary had been paid to Lance, he was not surprised to hear this, only pleasantly satisfied. Yet he looked at his brother with momentary keenness.

"You've not been getting into debt, or borrowing?"

"No, Russell, neither."

The young man looked relieved.

"I am glad of that. I have a detestation of debt. Come now—don't be afraid to tell me—what have you in hand now?"

Lancelot turned a flushed but smiling face towards him.

"Now, look here; none of that," he answered with unwonted firmness. "You let well alone. I've got you round capitally so far, and I won't have you bothering your head and throwing yourself back now. You just let business alone; leave things a little while longer in my capable hands, and do nothing but eat and sleep and get back your strength. I've managed

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very well so far, and so I will to the end; but so sure as you begin to worry you will have a relapse, and a nice state we shall be in then."

Russell felt himself sufficiently out of the wood to think lightly of the danger of relapse; but he was weak and tired, and glad to obey Lancelot's mandate. They were not at an end of their resources yet, and he should very soon be able to get finished the work that would bring in grist to the mill. He was still too feeble to trouble himself very greatly over the darkness of the future. He told himself that something must turn up; and upon the next day he made up his mind to write to Fred Carmichael, to remind him of a promise he had once made. It was less difficult for him to do this now than it would have been some weeks ago. Russell had been very near to the gates of death since those days, and he had come back from the borders of that shadowy land with some new thoughts and feelings he could hardly have defined. Life looked in some strange way softer and sweeter; it was less difficult to ask a favour than it had once been, and might be again perhaps. The following letter, though penned with a shaking hand, was not so much of an effort to write as it would have been when it could have been dashed off in a few seconds, instead of being written with many pauses and a good deal of fatigue:—

"DEAR CARMICHAEL,—You once told me that you

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believed you knew several fellows who would be glad of a little coaching in classics and mathematics, in preparation for examination, and that there was some chance of my being engaged in the capacity of coach. I have been ill lately, and have, owing to some alteration in Dr. Robertson's arrangements, lost my mastership at the school, so that I am wishful to hear of something soon, if possible. We are getting along very comfortably, and I am picking up fast. I shall soon be fit to go to work again, and shall be glad to find work to do. If you hear of anything, I know you will remember me.—Yours sincerely,

"RUSSELL GRAHAM."

A very few posts brought back a reply.

"MY DEAR GRAHAM,—I don't think there is any doubt about your getting plenty of coaching to do after Christmas. Most of the fellows are away now; but I know of several who want help with the non-medical subjects one has to get up, and I will communicate with them in due course. Sorry to hear of your illness. I've been so shut up since I have been living in hospital that I've hardly heard any news; but I hope to be relieved just before Christmas, and shall look you up very soon. Vera will be back by that time, and we shall hope to see more of you again. Don't bother your head about the other matter: I'm certain I can find you enough to keep you going, and

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you'd better not try to overdo it till you've got quite strong again.—Yours very sincerely,

"FRED CARMICHAEL."

"You see, Lance, things are coming right after all," said Russell, handing him the letter. "It's always darkest, they say, before the dawn."

Lancelot read it without comment. Somehow the very name of Carmichael had become distasteful to him of late.

Russell was looking thoughtfully into the fire. A heavy load had been lifted from his heart; his thin, worn face wore a peaceful look, and his eyes shone with a new brightness.

"After all, Lance," he said suddenly, "what a wonderful power prayer is."

"Is it, Russell?"

"It seems so to me. I cannot help feeling that this has come as a direct answer. I think in old days I trusted too much to myself. When this illness came, all that was knocked out of me. I had to look elsewhere. I had to learn to trust; and I have not trusted in vain, you see."

Lancelot was silent; he wished his brother would not talk in this vein. It made him uncomfortable, he hardly knew why. Russell seemed to divine this, and glanced at the boy with a look of affectionate scrutiny.

"You look as if you had had rather an anxious

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time of it, Lancelot," he said. "You have lost your old spirits, I think; and that will never do. I always look to you to be the life of the home. Dear old chap, you have been the very best of brothers and of nurses. I don't know what I should have done all this time without you. But you have shut yourself up too much with me. You are not quite your old self. You must go out more. You have not been anywhere all these weeks. It does not suit you. Why not go and spend an evening sometimes with the Carmichaels?"

"Oh, I don't care about that; I'd rather be with you." And Lance got rather red.

"Being too much with me doesn't seem to suit you altogether, old boy. How long is it since you've been to Iddesleigh Gardens?"

"Oh, I don't know quite. The boys have been so busy with exams, it's been no good trying to do anything."

"Well, the exams will be over this week, and then we shall see more of them. I want you to get that anxious look out of your eyes, Lance boy. If it's me you're anxious about, I think it is without cause. I feel on the way to get stronger than I've been for some time. You know people often say a regular illness really does one good sometimes: I believe that will be my case."

"I hope so," answered Lance; but he spoke without much animation.

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Russell was uneasy at the slight, indefinable change that had come over the boy of late. He could not account for it, but he was keenly conscious of its existence. A barrier of reserve and separation seemed to have arisen in some mysterious way between his brother and himself. He tried to believe it was his own fancy, but the endeavour was vain. More and more did he become imbued with the idea that Lancelot had some secret on his mind that he was hiding from his knowledge.

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CHAPTER XVII.

DISCOVERIES.

IT was Christmas eve, and Russell was alone, for he had with some difficulty persuaded Lancelot to accept an invitation from one of his schoolfellows to go to a sort of Christmas party and help in some charades. The boy's odd sort of reluctance to go out made Russell a little uncomfortable, and he had been very firm in urging him to accept this invitation. Lancelot had at length consented, and had gone off about four, to return most likely at somewhere about ten or half-past.

Russell sat over the fire with a book. He was still very weak and white and thin, bearing visible traces of severe recent illness; but, all things considered, he had done wonderfully, and was in capital spirits about himself. He had felt weak and ill and in danger of breaking down for so long, that when the worst was really over, and every day was bringing him nearer to health and strength, the rebound was considerable, and his spirits were more uniformly good than they had been for many a long day.

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It occurred to him presently that this evening would be a good opportunity for looking through the quarter's accounts and seeing how they stood financially, and how Lance had managed matters during his illness. The account-book was locked up in the boy's desk; but Russell soon found a key to fit it, and took the little book to the table to study its items. Lancelot had entered everything up till about the twelfth of the month with the greatest accuracy, and Russell was appalled at the magnitude of the sums spent in coal, medicine, meat, and so forth. It took him a very short time to make the necessary calculations, and he soon discovered that by the time the entries ceased to be made all their money had been exhausted; and for the past twelve days he could not imagine how they had been living. Lancelot had distinctly said that he had neither borrowed nor got into debt, and yet that he had plenty of money in hand. What, then, could have occurred to put him in possession of a reserve fund such as he evidently had to draw upon? What could have happened to give him command of a large sum of money? and why had he kept the matter a secret from his brother?

Russell leaned his head on his hand, a dim, cold sense of undefined apprehension falling upon him as he did so. He was still weak, and any excitement, however small, affected him painfully. His heart beat fast and his head swam, and yet he did not know what he feared, or if he feared anything.

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As he sat with the book before him, his thoughts still struggling with the problem it contained, and with the undefined apprehension aroused by the recollection of Lancelot's change of manner, a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the servant, aroused him from his reverie, and he looked up to take a letter from her hand.

"It was marked ''Mediate'—that's why I brought it up sharp," explained Martha. "It's for Mr. Lancelot."

"Thank you," said Russell mechanically. The letter was from Donald Carmichael, as he saw at a glance; and, as Martha had remarked, was labelled "Immediate," in large capitals underscored. There had never been any ceremony between the brothers in the matter of letters, and as this one seemed urgent Russell opened it and glanced at its contents without a moment's hesitation. As he did so, however, a deadly paleness overspread his face. His hand trembled painfully, and for a few moments it almost seemed as if he would faint; but he recovered himself when the first shock of surprise was over, and reperused the letter with the greatest care.

"MY DEAR LANCELOT," it ran, "we are all so awfully sorry for you, I can't tell you. It makes us quite miserable to think what straits you must have been in. Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you ask Pater for the money? He would have given

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it you directly, and saved you all this. We guessed from the first what had happened, because you were the only person who went into the study during Pater's short absence. Tiny was sitting on the stairs with Bill, waiting for us to come home from our exam, and she saw you go in and come out again. But Pater said that didn't *prove* anything; and it was only this morning, when the note came back from the Bank of England (notice had been lodged about it, you know) with your name on the back, that it all came out. You can't think how grieved we all are. Nobody's a bit angry; only, Lance, you must *say* something. It won't do to go on like this. Now, I'll tell you what I propose. You come off here the moment you get this letter: knock four times running, rather softly. I'll be on the watch and let you in. Then you shall tell Vera all about it;—she knows, but it will be easier for you to talk to her than to Pater. She has lots of money—£50 is nothing to her. She'll give it you directly, I know; and then she will go with you to Pater, and help you over it all; and you can pay him back, and it will be off your mind before Christmas day. *Do* do this, dear old Lance, and don't be afraid. You wouldn't be if you knew how awfully, horribly sorry we all are for you. I shall expect you about five. Don't stop to think, but come.—Yours truly, "DONALD CARMICHAEL."

Russell read this letter twice through; sat for a few

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minutes very still, looking like a man who has received a crushing blow, and is with difficulty recovering from its stunning effects; then collecting himself with an effort, he drew Lancelot's desk towards him and opened the secret drawer.

Yes, there was the money, the bulk of it at least —thirty-eight pounds in notes and gold. Russell put it carefully in his pocket-book and proceeded to unlock a drawer in the writing-table, the key of which he always kept in his own possession.

The drawer contained a few silver trinkets and one or two articles of jewelry. Russell had always kept these relics of the past as a sort of link with the old life that he often almost wished to forget. He had said to himself that if the worst came to the worst he would sell them, and with them all identification between his past and present self would be lost. So far he had never been reduced to parting with them, but now it seemed to him that the hour had come.

He did not want to think too much. He was afraid of becoming weakened and unmanned for the task before him. At present his business was not to think, but to act.

He put on his hat and overcoat with trembling hands. He was terribly afraid his strength would give out before his task was accomplished. But he braced his will with all the determination of his nature, and said to himself that he must and would do it, be the risk what it might.

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He put the contents of that locked drawer into his pocket, and slowly left the room and descended the stairs. He encountered nobody as he went out, and was in no condition to consider whether he was justified in venturing into the night air in his weakened state before the doctor had sanctioned his going out at all. All he could think of was, that his brother, under dire stress of temptation, had stolen money—had robbed their benefactors the Carmichaels, and that he must make good the loss before another hour had passed.

Luckily the night was mild and dry, and the tension of Russell's feelings gave him temporary strength. On his way to Iddesleigh Gardens he passed a jeweller and silversmith's shop, in which place he spent some ten minutes' time. Coming out, he had the satisfaction of feeling that he had the whole sum of money safely buttoned up in his breast-pocket.

He pursued his way to the Carmichaels', still resolutely keeping his thoughts in check; giving all his energy to the effort of reaching his destination, which seemed twice as distant as it had ever done before. But the familiar doorstep was gained at last, and in another minute he found himself ushered into Mr. Carmichael's study. He had asked for that gentleman himself; he felt unequal to seeing any one else.

The room was empty when he entered it, and Russell sat down literally gasping for breath. The

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excitement, the exertion, the painful interview before him, combined to tax his feeble strength to the utmost. He hardly knew now how to get through his explanation and apology. He looked so haggard and ill that he would have barely recognized his own face in the glass.

Mr. Carmichael came quickly. Russell rose; but his heart beat so furiously that it was some minutes before he could articulate a single word.

"Mr. Graham!" ejaculated his host with kindly concern. "I am sure you are not fit to be out. Sit down, sit down. I am sorry to see you look so ill. I had hoped you were better by this time—and so I suppose you are; but this is most imprudent."

"I could not help it," answered Russell, speaking in low tones and slowly. "Certain facts came to my knowledge to-day. Mr. Carmichael, I cannot talk of it yet; I have not seen Lancelot. I cannot tell how nor why it happened. I can only pray your forgiveness; and I have brought back the money."

Russell laid the notes down upon the table; his hand shook pitifully; every drop of blood had left his face. He would have risen to go, his errand being now accomplished, but he was physically incapable of the effort.

Mr. Carmichael was much disturbed; his benevolent face expressed as much. It was difficult to know how to frame an answer in such peculiar and painful circumstances.

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"Please do not give the matter another thought. We are all most grieved about it. Poor lad! he must have suffered sadly. Why did he not come to us? Mr. Graham, you must excuse my saying it, but I think it would have been so much better if you could have brought your mind to accepting us as friends when you stood in need of such. The time may come when we shall need friends ourselves, and I am sure you would stand by us in such a case."

Russell was in no state to enter into an argument. "You are very kind," he said. "It grieves me all the more that this should have happened. It is all more painful to me than I can express."

It was far more painful than Mr. Carmichael could understand. He could see, of course, that it was bad enough, but he could not know that it was made tenfold worse by the fact that it was he who had been defrauded; that had it been another the matter would have been robbed of the worst part of its sting. A boy had fallen into temptation, and had yielded and sadly fallen. It was a painful bit of business, but nothing so very terrible from Mr. Carmichael's standpoint. But to Russell's eyes things looked far worse. His fears for Lancelot had been realized even beyond his worst anticipations; and he had actually robbed the very man who had befriended them, as their father had robbed him years ago when he was his trusted associate.

It was all inexpressibly bitter to Russell, but he

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could not explain the cause of his keenest pain. Mr. Carmichael glanced at him, at the money on the table, hesitated, paused, and finally rose from his chair.

"Wait there will you, Mr. Graham? I have more to say yet, but I must ask you to excuse me half a minute first;" and he left the room somewhat hastily, struck by a sudden new thought.

Upstairs in the boudoir Vera and Fred were sitting over the fire together, enjoying each other's society all the more for the lapse of time since it had been possible to do so. They both turned at their father's entrance.

"Look here, Vera," said Mr. Carmichael: "that poor young Graham is down in my study—not the boy, but his elder brother—and he looks shockingly ill, not fit for any place but bed. He's got wind of this bit of business, and has brought back the money. I can't help fancying he must have been put to great shifts to get it; and really I don't know how to take it, nor yet, with a man of that sort, how to give it back. We know they must have been reduced to the lowest ebb before Lancelot would have become so desperate; and this brother can't have been making anything since, ill as he has been. I'm downright uncomfortable about it. What can be done, do you think? We can't let them starve this Christmas-tide, and it strikes me that is what will happen if he leaves this money and goes home."

"Then we will not let him go home!" said Vera

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quietly, rising as she spoke. "Let him spend his Christmas here, and Lancelot too, and the question of the money can stand over for the present. Before we let them go we can get something arranged; and as long as they remain with us we can see that they want for nothing."

"The very thing, my dear!" answered Mr. Carmichael. "I felt sure you would see a way out of the dilemma. You go and manage that part of the business, you and Fred, you know him so much better than I do. Mind you bring him to reason. Indeed, I don't think he's in a state to show much fight. He ought not to have come out, I am sure; at anyrate, he shall not go back."

Vera and Fred repaired to the study and greeted Russell with a quiet warmth and friendliness that was very comforting to him. They made no allusion to the object of his visit; and he, for his part, said nothing, though it was plainly enough in his thoughts. Fred asked him about his illness, and both expressed themselves very glad that he had got well so soon; and then Vera, turning to him with her own particularly winning smile, said,—

"And now, Mr. Graham, we have a favour to ask of you, and we expect you to grant it."

"A favour?"

"Yes; the favour of your company and Lancelot's for Christmas. We intend to take no refusal, so it is no use your attempting it. We have quite made

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up our minds. It will be good for Lance to come, I am quite sure of that," she added, with gentle insistance in her tone. "It may be a little painful at first, but it will be far the best thing that could happen. You are to stay here now, and we will send for the boy and your baggage; and we will forget everything that has gone before, and enjoy a happy Christmas together."

"To be sure," put in Fred, anticipating any reply. "I haven't seen you for months, and there are lots of things I have to talk over with you, and some letters to show you. And you know you will be much better for a little change. Nothing like it when a fellow has been ill and is on the mend. My father is very anxious to keep you, Graham; so we will, if you please, consider the matter settled."

"You are very good," said Russell, and paused. He was so excessively tired that he found even speech difficult. He did not want to stay. He would have given much to be at home again in the familiar room at his lodgings; but the puzzle was how to say so and how to get there.

Fred gave his sister a glance, and she went away to order a room to be got ready for the visitor; and in about an hour's time Russell Graham, to his own undeniable astonishment, found himself comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair beside a roaring fire, more asleep than awake, and with only a very imperfect recollection as to how he got there.

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But he was too drowsy and comfortable to trouble his head about anything, too tired to wish to rouse himself to think. Tiny and Bill paid him furtive visits from time to time; and the little girl came in with his dinner, and cut it up, and insisted on his eating it. She was immensely amused at the way he kept falling asleep; and he could not help catching the infection of her mirth, and laughed himself when he woke up and met the merry gleam of her blue eyes. He had a dim idea that there was something painful in the background of his thoughts—something dark behind the present warmth and ease; but he was much too weary to try and find out its cause, and was content to accept the good things of the present as they came to him without question or remark.

When Fred joined Vera after helping Russell to his room, he had a good deal to say to her. He held in his hand the card of a silversmith in the neighbourhood. He held it out to his sister, and said,—

"Let me have some money, Vera—fifteen or twenty pounds. I know you always have plenty of ready cash. The poor fellow has gone and sold all the few valuables in his possession to make up the amount of the note. I must buy them back sharp, and we'll manage some way of getting him to take them."

Vera went at once to her davenport.

"How do you know all that, Fred? Did he tell you?"

"I got it out of him. I was determined I would. I knew if they had been reduced to such straits before,

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they couldn't have money coming in, and he out of employment too. He was too tired to be obstinate about anything, poor chap, and a little judicious cross-questioning brought it all out. He's kept a few heir-looms by him about which Lance knew nothing, and these he sold to-night. He didn't say where; but this card was among the notes on the study table, so I have no doubt about it. I'll just run across and buy them back at once, before any one else can do so. I know you want them, Vera, and you can manage about returning them to him later."

Vera smiled and handed her brother the money.

"Yes, go and make sure of them now. Poor Mr. Graham! how sad it all is! Don't you think he looks dreadfully ill, Fred?"

"I think he looks as if he had been pretty bad; but if he hasn't taken cold with coming out to-night, which he'd no business at all to do, I don't see why he should not do very well. He's only done up with fatigue. It's a great thing for him to be in a comfortable house instead of poky, draughty lodgings.—Well, I'm off now. I'll be back soon."

Fred was as good as his word. He was hardly ten minutes gone; and he came back with a neat jeweller's parcel in his hand.

"All right," he said: "it was just as I thought. That was the man, sure enough. I got the lot back for fifteen pound ten. Here's the change, and here's the purchase."

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Vera was about to put the packet away unopened, when her brother said,—

"There was a coat-of-arms upon the signet-ring that seemed familiar to me. I haven't much of a memory for that sort of thing, but you have. Just open the parcel and look. The things are your own property, you know. You needn't be afraid of looking at them."

Vera smiled a little as she broke the seal.

"You always were so curious, Fred;—talk of the curiosity of women!"

She opened the packet and glanced at the articles it contained. These were a ring, a bracelet, a sort of silver case that opened down the centre, and two or three more trifles in worked silver.

"Curious!" said Vera, taking up the bracelet, the most valuable of the articles. "I have the very facsimile of this upstairs. It is exactly like a set of Aunt Mary's; and the odd thing is one of the bracelets is missing. She had given it away to a friend, she told me; it will be strange if this should be the very one."

Fred was examining the ring.

"There it is; do you recognize it? I fancy I've seen that ring before."

Vera could not be certain that she remembered it; but the curiosity of brother and sister was aroused, they hardly knew why.

They both had a sort of undefined impression that

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they were on the edge of a discovery of some kind. Neither owned to the feeling, but both experienced it to some extent.

Vera took up the silver case, examined the workmanship carefully, and saw finally how it could be opened.

"I don't know if one has a right to look inside," she said. "It seems almost like prying into other people's private affairs."

"I don't suppose you will find anything so very private there. Graham would not have sold it if it contained a history or mystery."

So Vera turned back the silver leaves and exposed to view the delicate miniature of a boy's head. It was executed with the greatest finish, and represented a beautiful boy, with lustrous dark eyes, a bright, courageous face, and a look of earnest resolve, blended with frank gaiety and happiness. Beneath were the words of a name—"ARTHUR RUSSELL GORDON."

Vera gazed at the portrait as if fascinated, and then looked at her brother.

"Fred!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

He returned her gaze for a moment, and then burst into a fit of laughter.

"Eureka!" he shouted triumphantly. "Eureka! we have found it!—we have found him!"

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CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTMAS.

RUSSELL was sound asleep, sleeping the dreamless sleep of exhaustion, when Fred brought Lancelot from the dreary lodging-house to the comfortable mansion in Iddesleigh Gardens. The boy looked very pale and subdued as he entered the familiar hall; and his face began to quiver when Vera advanced with outstretched hands, and for the first time in her life laid a caressing touch upon his shoulder and kissed him in loving, sisterly fashion.

"Poor, dear Lance," she said softly. "Poor boy! it has been very dark and sad for you. But everything is coming right now."

Lancelot almost shrank away.

"I'm not fit for you to touch," he said hoarsely and unsteadily. "I oughtn't to be here at all. I ought to be in p—prison;" and then came a great choking sob, and Lancelot fairly gave way and broke into passionate weeping.

Vera led him into the dining-room and let him cry,

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feeling certain it would do him good. She guessed that he must have suffered very much during these past miserable days, and that tears would relieve his overstrained heart better than anything else could do. Fred left the boy in his sister's hands, knowing that she would manage him best.

Lancelot sat with his head bowed upon the table; heavy sobs shook his frame. Vera stood beside him, and as he began at last to grow calmer, she laid her hand gently upon his head.

"Dear Lance," she said gently, "do not cry so bitterly. Nobody is angry with you. We are only so very, very sorry."

Lancelot gulped down his tears and answered,—

"That makes it almost harder."

"Oh no, Lancey, don't say that;—and it will so soon be all forgotten."

Lancelot shook his head vehemently.

"No, it won't. I shall never, never forget. And Russell will never hold up his head again. Oh, how could I? how could I?"

"It was a sudden temptation, Lancelot, and you were not quite yourself, with all the watching and anxiety you had gone through. If I had been at home I believe you would have come to me."

"I would, indeed I would!" he cried, catching hold of her hand and holding it hard. "I would have told you directly; but you were not there, nor Mr. Fred; and Miss Sefton and Mr. Wells had gone away, and

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there seemed nobody left in all the world; and the money was all gone, and the doctor said if he didn't have all the food and warmth and everything he wanted, that he would have a relapse and die. I don't think I quite knew what I was doing that day."

"Poor Lance, poor Lancey!" said Vera tenderly.

"He said that," pursued the boy, waxing vehement as he went on; "and I had less than four shillings left. I didn't know what to do, I did so hate to beg or borrow; and though I came to see your father, and I believe I should have asked him, I was so frightened, and I did so detest telling all about ourselves, that when I saw all that money lying there, and thought nobody would know I had been into the house, I just took it and made off, and went and got everything Russell needed. I wasn't sorry even then," he added, looking up with appealing sadness into Vera's face; "I only thought that Russell would get well, and I didn't care for anything else."

"Poor Lancey!" she said again.

Somehow this quiet sympathy made it easy for him to speak out.

"It is just what Russell always said," he went on, with a certain dejection of manner that was quite new in him. "He said I should give way like I did in the end, and yield to some sudden temptation. I don't know what made him afraid of it, but he was; and mother was too, even when I was quite a little boy. She used to tell me that my motto ought to be

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'Watch and pray,' so that I might not be led into temptation; but I never really believed there was any danger, and I never did either one or the other, and this is the end of it."

"Not the end, but the beginning, we will hope, dear Lance," said Vera gently.

He looked up wistfully.

"The beginning of what? It all looks so dark. I don't know how to hold up my head amongst you all."

"The beginning of brighter, happier days to come," answered Vera, with a smile that almost won an answering brightness from Lancelot's sad face. "I am not going to tell you how it is all coming about, but I will tell you this much, that the dark days are over now, both for you and for your brother. And, Lance dear, you will never hear a word more from any of us about that one act that we have all agreed to try and forget. Russell has paid back the money; we all know how hardly you were pressed, and it is never to be talked of any more. The servants do not know, nor the children—only just ourselves and your brother; and our great wish is that you should hold up your head again and spend a happy Christmas with us. You need not *forget* it exactly, Lance; perhaps it will be a memory that will be useful to you as years go by, and will help to strengthen you against temptation. If this one fall teaches you your lesson to watch and pray, it will be almost worth all the misery and wretchedness you have endured."

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Lancelot took Vera's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"I will try—I will," he answered earnestly. "I have learned a great many lessons lately, I think. I shall not forget if you do; but I will try to be happy again, and I will try to learn to watch and pray."

Lance went to bed that night saddened and subdued, yet happier in spite of this than he had been for many days previously. A leaden weight seemed lifted from his heart, and despite the oppressive sense of wrong-doing, which looked different to-night from what it had ever done before, he could face the future more bravely and hopefully, and best of all he could pray. He did pray that night as he had never prayed in his life; and he rose from his knees with a sense of sweet confidence that his prayer had been heard. He slept that night more quietly than he had done since the commencement of Russell's illness, and things had assumed their old brightness when he arose next morning.

A sort of gay Christmas atmosphere pervaded the house. Donald and Fritz rushed into Lancelot's room, in a state of *demi-toilette*, to wish him the customary good wishes, and re-establish the old intimacy that had a little waned of late. The boy's cheeks glowed at the sight of his companions, but Fritz's boisterous merriment and Donald's hearty good-will prevented any awkwardness on either side; and the moment Lancelot was dressed he slipped away downstairs

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and presented himself at the door of Mr. Carmichael's study.

He was familiar with the ways of the house; he knew that the master was an early riser, and was generally in his own room half-an-hour at least before the prayer-bell rang. Mr. Carmichael's pardon must be asked before the boy could feel at ease, and he was anxious to get the interview over as quickly as possible.

It was not half so hard as he had anticipated. Mr. Carmichael was very kind, and without making any attempt to pass over the serious nature of the offence, and the weakness of moral principle showed in the act of yielding so quickly and readily to temptation, he nevertheless was so ready to forgive, so sincerely sorry for the offender, and so anxious that he should now dismiss the painful theme from his mind and enjoy his Christmas with the rest, that Lancelot was able to leave the room with a lightened heart and a smiling face, and to join in the eager clamour of greetings that hailed his appearance in the dining-room almost as frankly and freely as if nothing of a painful nature had happened. It was not that he dismissed the matter from his mind in the old heedless fashion; no, too deep an impression had been made upon him this time for that to be possible. It was only that in the glad sense of being forgiven, both by his friends on earth and his Father in heaven, his heart was so full of gratitude and joy

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and love, that there was no room left for other feelings to have place.

There were so many things to be thankful for too. Russell was none the worse for his imprudence of the previous evening. He had had a capital night, and was still quite disposed to sleep. He had not thoroughly roused up so far, and it was thought better that he should not do so. Later on, whilst they were all at church, he could get up and find his way to the boudoir, and he could see visitors there in the afternoon; but Lance was advised not to go to him just now. It was advisable to avoid reminding him of anything likely to disturb him, so that he might sleep as long as possible.

Breakfast was a merry meal in that hospitable house. The table was piled with presents, and Lance had as many as any one, despite the suddenness of his appearance there. But Vera had a way of managing everything in the most delightful fashion, and Lance felt once again as if he almost belonged to this warm-hearted friendly family.

Vera looked at him with new and vivid interest. She knew now what the likeness was that had haunted her mind and puzzled her brain for so long. It was the likeness the lad bore to the father he so closely resembled in temperament and character, as in feature and colouring. Mr. Carmichael saw the same thing too, and exchanged a smile with his daughter as he caught her glance resting often upon

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the boy's face. Nothing was to be said just yet as to the discovery made; but later on Vera had the task before her of breaking to Russell what they had found out, together with the details of the trust reposed in her hands. It was a keen pleasure to Mr. Carmichael thus to have traced the sons of his old friend from the obscurity in which they had shrouded themselves, and to feel that the old warm friendship was likely to be handed down to another generation.

Madge was Lancelot's companion on the walk to church that sunny Christmas morning. She chattered gaily to him on the way, but was more silent and thoughtful on the return journey. Lancelot too was very quiet, for the beauty of the service, the words of love and peace and good-will had sunk deeply into his heart, and he felt a more earnest longing after right, a more steadfast wish to follow it, than he had ever known before.

"Lance," said Madge suddenly, "I wish one could be good for a whole year, by trying very hard."

He looked at her quickly, for he had been thinking much after the same fashion.

"Can't one?" he asked quickly.

"I'm afraid not—at least I know I can't," answered Madge honestly. "Some days, like to-day you know, I feel as if I could never want to be naughty again; but I know it will all pass off, and I shall be doing and thinking what I ought not before a week is over. I never knew how hard it was to be good till I began

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to try harder—after that day we were so nearly drowned, you know. Isn't it queer, that the more one tries the harder it seems, and the worse one often feels?"

Lancelot shook his head as if he didn't quite understand.

"I'm afraid I've tried so little," he said.

Madge gave him a quick look of sympathy.

"But you are going to try now?"

"Yes," he answered, "I am, Madge. I suppose you know about—about—?"

"Yes, yes," she answered hurriedly. "We won't talk about that now; but, Lance, do you know, I sometimes think a horrid sort of thing like that helps one a whole lot. I never cared about being obedient till we were nearly drowned through disobeying; and now I've found out that though it isn't always easy, yet it's much nicer to obey rules than to break them especially Vera's."

"She's so kind," put in Lance parenthetically.

"Yes, she's as dear and sweet as she can be. I do love her; but it's not half so bad obeying Miss Sefton as it used to be. I'm getting quite fond of her; she's so funny and amusing now that we behave better to her, and tells us stories by the hour together. I can't think, Lance, why it is so hard to be good, because it really is so much nicer when we are."

Madge propounded the puzzle with a sort of arch gravity, but she was serious enough for all that.

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Lance pondered a little, and then suggested with some diffidence,—

"I suppose Russell would say it was because we didn't watch and pray enough."

Madge considered the point.

"That would help, of course. I'll try it," she said with decision. "Only one does forget so soon. Never mind, one ought to be able to keep three little words like those in one's head. I mean to try anyhow."

"And so do I," answered Lancelot softly.

"That's all right. I like other people to feel as I do, it seems more sociable. I know I shall come to grief awfully sometimes; but I won't let that bother me beforehand. One can but do one's best; nobody can do more than that, and it's not expected of one either. The harder it is to do, the better when it is done."

Lancelot saw his brother that afternoon. Russell was up and dressed and in the drawing-room, and seemed none the worse for the excitement and fatigue of the previous day. He looked only rather sorrowful and down-hearted, as if some trouble had come over his life that it would be difficult to forget.

Yet he did not say much to Lancelot, and the few words of reproach were very gently and lovingly spoken. He saw that the boy had suffered and had repented, and he had no wish to add to the burden of his sorrow.

"I shan't forget your words again, Russell," said

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Lancelot very earnestly. "Indeed I think I have learned my lesson now. Indeed, indeed I mean to be different in the future, and in the right way, I hope. Russell, why is it that you have always been afraid that I should do something like that?"

Russell flushed a little.

"Have I always been afraid of that?"

"You know you have. You have almost said as much sometimes. I wish you would tell me why."

Russell paused in thought. Lance looked eagerly at him, wondering if he would speak.

"Lancelot," said Russell presently, "I think that you have the right to ask such a question and receive an answer; but it is hard to give you one. You do not know, because you never saw him, how very like our father you are."

"Am I? You never speak of our father, Russell; and mother never did either."

"No."

Lancelot's colour came and went.

"Why?" he asked uneasily; "what is the mystery? Did he—did he—?"

"He yielded to temptation, and defrauded one who had been his friend, and who trusted him implicitly; and he died before he could make any atonement."

Lancelot sat very silent. He had always had a vague idea that some shadow hung over their past, but he had never known what it was.

"Why did you never tell me before?"

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"I never like to think of it myself; but this act of yours brought it all so terribly back. Lancelot, my dear, dear boy, you will never quite know how terrible it was to me to find out what you had done; but—"

"Ah, Russell, don't talk so! don't look like that! Believe me, I have suffered too. I don't think I can ever forget the lesson I have learned."

There was a ring of manly firmness and sincerity in the boy's tone that gave a new quality to his voice. He seemed to have grown older, and Russell looked at him earnestly and searchingly,

"Then we will say no more, Lance. You must show me in the future that I can trust you."

"I will, I will," answered the boy eagerly. Then, after a pause, he asked timidly, "Russell, they say you gave all the money back. I had spent more than ten pounds. How did you get that?"

"Never mind, Lance. I did get it, and that is enough; and got it without borrowing either. I had a little reserve fund of my own laid by against our extreme need. If you had applied to me instead of—, we might have been saved from this."

"We!" echoed Lancelot almost indignantly. "Don't say *we*. Don't talk as if you were mixed up in any way with that miserable bit of business. It had nothing to do with you."

Russell smiled a little sadly

"Had it not, my boy? Ah, Lance, when you are

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a little bit older you will understand that no life can be lived in that independent fashion; no sin committed that has not its reflex action affecting others beside the perpetrator. Life is a strange, deep, wide thing; it cannot be lived only to ourselves. '*Sic vos non vobis*' has a wider meaning than the one Virgil applied. Never think that you can condone wrong-doing by the thought that after all you will be the only sufferer. Whether or not you know it, others will suffer too."

Lance sat very still and thoughtful, a new feeling of responsibility rising up within him. He had never seen life in its wider aspect before.

"I will think of that, Russell," he said thoughtfully. "What a lot of new things I have got to learn! There seems no end to them."

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRUST DISCHARGED.

"YES, the office of guardian has its responsibilities," said Vera gravely, a little smile hovering, nevertheless, around the corners of her lips; "but I don't know that it is a more onerous one than that of trustee."

"That is an office I know less about," answered Russell smiling. "A trust involves the possession of property. Lance and I have not been troubled like that."

It was a few days after Christmas when this conversation took place, and Russell and his brother were still guests in the house of their friends the Carmichaels. The one attempt the young man had made to return to their lodgings in Jervis Street had been so emphatically snubbed and crushed that he had yielded gracefully to the inevitable, and was quite surprised to find how pleasant it was to belong once more to a family circle, and to be surrounded by the little refinements of life to the absence of which he

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had never really grown reconciled. He enjoyed it all so much that he had not begun to be over-anxious yet about the future. Fred's emphatic assurances that it was "all right" contented him for the present, and kept uneasy fears at bay; and this ease of mind, combined with plentiful, nourishing diet, change of scene, and cheerful companionship, were making quite a new man of him. He felt this himself, and would laugh with a sense of glad assent when Tiny sometimes assured him gravely that he was "quite different" from when she first knew him. He was different, healthier both in mind and body, and he knew that this was so.

Not the least factor in his present happiness was, as he well knew, the charm exercised over him by Vera's gentle presence. The old boyish homage, tinged with something new and sweet, had come back and conquered all the shrinking and reluctance he had once felt towards meeting those who bore her name. A humbler and healthier feeling had come over him, banishing much of the old morbid sense of shame and pain. Vera's smile seemed to charm it all away; and during these past days it was strange what intimacy of thought and feeling had grown up between them. It was quite easy to Russell to talk a little of some of his difficulties and anxieties regarding Lancelot, as he had been doing this afternoon, which discussion had led Vera to the point she aimed at—that of saying something about the difficulties of trusteeship.

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"I think," she said presently, "that women ought to be exempt from offices like that."

"Do you occupy that responsible place then, Miss Carmichael?" he asked smiling. "Are you a trustee?"

"Yes, I am, and under very peculiar and difficult circumstances. I am trustee for some one of whom all trace has been lost for years. Don't you think that is a pretty onerous office?"

"Yes indeed. But what an odd thing! It must have been a very extraordinary will that imposed an obligation like that upon you."

"Yes, the circumstances were unusual. I will tell you about it if you like. Between lights is the right time for telling stories, is it not? Not that mine is exactly a story, but it is rather odd and interesting."

"I should like to hear it, whatever it is," said Russell, who always took pleasure in hearing Vera talk, quite independently of the subject in hand. Naturally he had no suspicion whither all this tended.

"I daresay you know that a great part of my life has been lived with an aunt of mine, who was ordered to Tasmania for her health, and persuaded my parents to spare me to go with her. She was like a second mother to me, and I remained with her until her death, which took place rather more than a year ago. It was her will that imposed upon me the trust I have spoken about."

Vera paused, glancing for a moment at her companion, whose face, revealed by the bright fire-light,

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exhibited no trace of emotion. Her own face was in shadow; she leaned back still more into the shade, but fixed her glance intently upon Russell as she continued her tale.

"My aunt had a very dear friend, to whom she was deeply attached. It had not been a friendship of very long standing—I mean by this that it was a friendship made after both had reached womanhood, not one that had grown up from childhood—and of the past and early history of her friend my aunt knew little. They were, however, deeply attached; and yet—such things do happen, you know—they lost sight of each other, and my aunt was never able to discover what had become of her friend. She did her utmost to trace her out, but all endeavours proved fruitless. She seemed to have vanished utterly, to the deep sorrow of many others who also had loved her."

Again Vera paused. Russell had drawn a little back into the shadow. She could not see his face so plainly as she had done before.

"My aunt was much grieved at this, for she had loved her well; and she had loved, too, the son of her friend, a bright, handsome boy, who was also her godson." (Vera was certain then that Russell started. She saw his hand tighten its grasp upon the arm of his chair.) "When she made her will she divided her property into two halves. One half she left to me, and one to her godson; and until he was found I

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was to be the trustee. At one time, before her health gave way, she left England, taking me with her. She had purposed making the boy her heir, getting him, perhaps, to take her name and to be much with her. But she changed that purpose when she partially adopted me, and she divided her property between us. But you can guess the difficulties of my position when the terms of the will became known to me, and I found myself not only encumbered with considerable pecuniary responsibilities myself, but made sole trustee for the fortune of somebody else of whom all trace seemed lost. Do you wonder, now, that I call the office of trustee onerous and responsible?"

"No, not in your case," was the answer, spoken in very low tones.

"It weighs me down a good deal at times," said Vera, a little smile hovering over her face as she glanced at the irresponsive figure opposite. "I should so like to discharge the burden of obligation and rid myself of this troublesome trust. I want to find the missing man badly. I knew him years ago: we were children together and play-fellows; we were fond of each other. Do you think he would appear if we advertised for him? His name is Arthur Russell Gordon."

Vera spoke in the most natural and innocent way possible, yet a dead silence followed these words. Russell made no attempt to speak.

"Do you think advertising would be any good?"

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repeated Vera, still with the same charming air of *insouciance.* "He used to be a very proud, self-willed boy, I remember; but he had not the kind of disposition that would take pleasure in thwarting and disappointing. Do you think he would notice and answer an advertisement?"

"Why do you ask me?" asked Russell with praiseworthy composure.

"Arthur," said Vera, suddenly bending forward so that he could see her smiling face and catch the gleam of arch merriment that sparkled in her eyes—"Arthur, are you not ashamed of yourself, masquerading under a false name like this, and trying to deceive old friends who have a claim to better treatment at your hands? What have you got to say for yourself? Let me hear your defence, if you have any."

Russell rose to his feet suddenly, and Vera followed his example. He was pale and grave, she flushed and smiling. She held out her hand, and he took it silently.

"Mr. Graham," she said; "or shall I say Mr. Gordon, why have you kept your identity hidden from us so long?"

"Can you not guess?" he asked sadly. "One thought of the past will answer that question."

"Indeed it does not," answered Vera. "I know, of course, to what you allude; but do you not know how little loss was really sustained? Ah, if only your father—"

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She stopped suddenly short; but he understood her meaning and made a sorrowful sign of assent, although it was only the first part of her speech that he answered.

"Yes, so I have heard," he said. "I am very glad and thankful it was so; and yet the intention was the same, the weakness the—the—betrayal of trust." He stopped, and looked at her with great earnestness. "Miss Carmichael, how did you find out my secret?"

"I found it out on Christmas eve; how, I will tell you another time."

"Who knows it besides yourself?"

"My father and Fred, nobody else."

He looked agitated. It had all come very suddenly upon him.

"Miss Carmichael, must it be known? It is very strange and painful to me this sudden tearing away of the veil. I cannot understand it yet."

Vera smiled with a sense of sympathy that soothed him unconsciously.

"Painful to find yourself a well-to-do man instead of a poor one?"

He passed his hand across his brow.

"It is so difficult to realize it," he said. "I remember my god-mother very well. Is it really true that she left me half her fortune?"

"Perfectly true; about five-and-twenty thousand pounds, rather more, and there is the year's interest too.

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How much you might have saved yourself if you had only told the truth when first you came to know us!"

He stood musing deeply.

"Miss Carmichael," he said presently, "perhaps it would have been the wiser and manlier course. I am not fond of deception; but I was hampered by my mother's wishes, and by the morbid feelings that had grown up within me in the solitary life I had led. I believe my mother was morbid upon the subject, and I am sure she made me so. I used sometimes to feel that I was neglecting to follow the spirit of her wishes when I allowed Lancelot to become acquainted with your brothers and gradually followed suit myself."

"You must not think so any more. I am sure if your mother had known how we all felt for her and towards her, she would not have fallen into that morbid state. Did she never know how hard we tried to find her?"

Russell shook his head.

"She never knew anything about it. She took her maiden name, and we buried ourselves in a little out-of-the-way place in Normandy; and later on we moved to Germany, where most of our time was spent. She had a little money allowed her by a relative—the only one who had kept up any intercourse with her since her marriage, and who was sorry for her in her trouble. He found her out and helped us a little, or I do not know what would have

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become of us. He died shortly after her death, and left me a hundred pounds. That brought me and Lance to England, and kept us alive till I had found regular work at Dr. Robertson's. From that time you know our history."

"And now brighter days are coming," said Vera with a smile. "You do not know what a load it has taken from my mind to have found Arthur Gordon at last."

He gave a little start at the sound of the long-unheard name.

"I think it must be Russell Graham still," he said. "I cannot change again. She would not wish it—my mother; she would have liked me always to keep the name she changed mine to after the sorrow had fallen upon us."

"So be it," answered Vera brightly. "I know you best as Russell Graham, and there is no need to awaken painful memories or to stir up questions that are best left at rest. But tell me, do you forgive me for finding out your secret at last? You are not sorry really that the truth should be made known?"

"No, I am not sorry," he answered after a moment's pause, looking down at her with a smile in his eyes. "I think, after the strangeness has worn off, that I shall find it a relief. Sometimes it has been very hard to keep the secret from you, Vera."

He spoke the name unconsciously, as he had spoken it in the days of their childhood. Her answering smile was very bright.

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"Ah, now you are like the Arthur I remember. I am so glad that my trust is over—so glad that we have found you out, and that you are the same Arthur you were before. Now come with me; I want to take you to father. You cannot think how pleased he is to welcome again the son of his old friend. You must never think of your father now as anything else but my father's friend."

And he went with her willingly, with a new elasticity of mind and body, feeling the relief of having at last freed himself from the burden of a secret that had weighed him down more than he knew.

The fatherly greeting of Mr. Carmichael, and Fred's hearty, merry welcome, together with the comically-told story of the means by which the discovery had been made, went far to drive away all painful shrinking from Russell's heart. The news of this wonderful fortune, too, was not without its effect. He was bewildered and confused at all that was happening, but very grateful and very happy.

His happiness he did not seek to analyze. He was aware that it took its rise in something deeper and sweeter than mere relief that a life of unremitting toil and drudgery was no longer to be his portion. He was aware that the possession of wealth cleared away certain barriers and obstructions that had hitherto in one direction completely barred his path. He did not seek to discover in what direction that lay—the time for analysis had not yet come—but he knew that he

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was strangely and calmly happy, with a deep sense of well-being and content that he had never experienced all his life before.

That night he and Lancelot sat up very late over their fire, talking earnestly together of past, present, and future. The boy was deeply stirred by hearing the history of the past. It opened up to him a consciousness of what might result from one sudden sinful act of weakness in a way that was an absolute revelation to him. He saw the analogy between his own deed, in yielding to sudden temptation not long since, and that fatal error on his father's part that had led to such disastrous consequences—had driven him to desperation, had broken his wife's heart, had thrown a blight over his children's lives, and had ruined the fair prospects they had been born to. He saw it all now with vivid comprehension and clearness; and with a manlier look upon his face he turned to Russell and said,—

"I understand now all that you said. You were quite right: it was just as you feared. I did not think, and I did not care; but I believe I do understand life better now, and I am sure I never shall forget the need there always is to watch and pray."

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CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

"DEAR Bill," said Tiny sedately, "what a lot of things have happened since Christmas!"

The serious tone in which this remark was made caused Bill to rear himself up on his haunches and lay his broad muzzle upon his little mistress's shoulder in token of sympathy.

"You are *so* nice, Bill dear, you always understand," said Tiny, with loving warmth. "Such a lot of things, and such nice things too, though I didn't think they would be nice at first."

She paused, and Bill wagged his tail as if to encourage her to proceed.

"We always thought, Madge and I, that it would be so horrid if Vera ever got married. (It's so nice of Madge to be such friends with me. Since Raby got engaged to Mr. Wells—Edgar he likes me to call him—Madge and I have got to be such great friends, and it is very nice.) Madge always said, 'Now if Vera gets engaged too, and goes and gets

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married and leaves us all alone again, it will be just horrid!' But now that she is going to be married very soon, it doesn't seem horrid one bit; and it doesn't seem like her going away, because she's going to live just as close to us as ever she can. *I* think it will be like having two homes instead of one; don't you, dear Bill?"

Bill wagged his tail eagerly.

"I knew you did. You always think what I do—we always did think alike; and, Bill, you're very fond of Russell, aren't you, though you did bite him once."

Bill's tail flopped more and more vehemently upon the floor, his nose was pressed closer and closer against Tiny's cheek.

"I knew you did. We always like the same people—we always did; and *I* liked Russell ever so much the very first time I saw him. I liked him better than Vera did. I told them so yesterday, and made them laugh. We all like him; the boys are just as fond of him as they can be, and so is Fred, and so is papa. There's nobody we should like half so well for a brother, and I think it was very nice of Vera to give him to us instead of somebody we shouldn't like nearly so much;" and Tiny nodded her little head and looked uncommonly wise. Then a very serious look came over her face, and she regarded her companion very attentively.

"Bill," she said, "I hope you will behave very nicely when Vera goes away and Miss Sefton comes

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to live here. She is *getting* fond of you, I do think; but I'm afraid you don't *much* like her yet, and when you wrinkle up your nose and show your teeth, she thinks you are fierce and thinks you are ugly. I can't understand how any one can think you ugly, you have *such* a sweet face; but she does, and you must be very good."

Bill looked all the acquiescence he could.

"That's another funny thing, that Miss Sefton is going to live here, and that we don't mind it a bit. Once Madge would have been *so* angry; but now she only laughs. Madge is *very* nice, I think, though she does tease Miss Sefton sometimes, and me too, and you too, Bill; but she is so funny we can't help laughing, can we? I think I'm glad Miss Sefton is coming. She will have such a much nicer room than she has now, and she will tell me stories in the evenings about her little nieces and nephews we sent presents to. Vera says perhaps I may have little Angela to stay with me sometimes, which would be very nice. *She* loves you, dear Bill; she said so when she wrote to me; and you would be very good to her, because she is never quite strong and well like me. I would make her so happy, and take her to see Vera's pretty house—I suppose it is Russell's now, but it will soon be Vera's too; and I think it is just the nicest, prettiest house in the world, and so close to ours that it doesn't seem as if she would be going away when she goes there. I'm sorry Lance and

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Don are going to Germany for a year, but they seem to like it very much; and papa wants Don to learn German, so it's no use minding, and a year will not be so very long after all. It's about a year since you bit Russell that day; do you remember, Bill? O Bill, how dreadfully ashamed you did make me feel! and yet it sometimes seems quite a little time ago, although such lots of things have happened since. Do you hear somebody coming, Bill? Is that why you prick up your ears? I hear steps too; I think it's Vera and Russell."

Tiny was quite right: it was Vera and Russell returning from some shopping expedition on which they had embarked.

"Well, little one, all alone?" said Vera gently; whilst Russell lifted her up and placed her upon his knee.

"I wasn't alone. I had Bill. We were talking about things," answered Tiny seriously.

"A very serious colloquy it must have been," said Russell, a smile upon the face that was no longer thin and anxious, but full of calm repose and satisfaction. "You looked very grave as we came in."

"Did we?" asked Tiny. "I don't think I felt grave. I was thinking what a great many things had happened in a year."

Vera smiled at the child, which encouraged Tiny to proceed.

"I was reminding Bill of the day he bit you," she

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said, looking straight up into the kindly face above her. "I think it well he should think sometimes about the naughty things he has done. You're not much like what you were that day," she added with some emphasis. "I was a little afraid of you then, though I always liked you, and I thought you looked rather sad. I'm not a bit afraid of you now, and you don't look at all sad either."

Russell laughed.

"Quite right, Tiny," he said, "and spoken like a book to boot."

"Bill wants to be noticed," said Tiny, looking down. "You ought to like Bill, Russell, for he's very fond of you."

"So I do," he answered, patting the dog's head. "Bill and I are capital friends. I ought to make much of him, seeing it was he who effected the introduction between us. But for Bill, Tiny, I might never have known you. I might be living in Jervis Street still."

Tiny opened her eyes very wide.

"*Might* you, Russell?—Oh dear, clever Bill, how very good you are!"

Then she looked up with a new thought in her head.

"Was it Bill who made you happy, then, too?"

Russell laughed with a keen sense of amusement.

"Well, not quite, Tiny; but he was an indirect agent, if you know what that is."

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Tiny shook her head; but she was still intent on her own thought.

"Something must have made you happy," she said, "though, if it wasn't Bill, I don't quite know what it was. Perhaps," with a sudden gleam of inspiration, "it was that funny thing I don't understand—what does Madge call it? Vera's something—Vera's trust."

Both listeners looked at her with amusement.

"What do you know about Vera's trust, little one?" asked the young man.

"I don't know anything; but sometimes I hear people talk. *Was* it Vera's trust that made you happy, Russell?"

Russell's eyes rested for a moment upon the sweet, flushed face of his promised wife, then he kissed Tiny smilingly.

"Quite right, little one," he said gently. "It is Vera's trust that has made a happy man of me."

THE END.

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